

# The Elementary English Review

C. C. Certain, Editor

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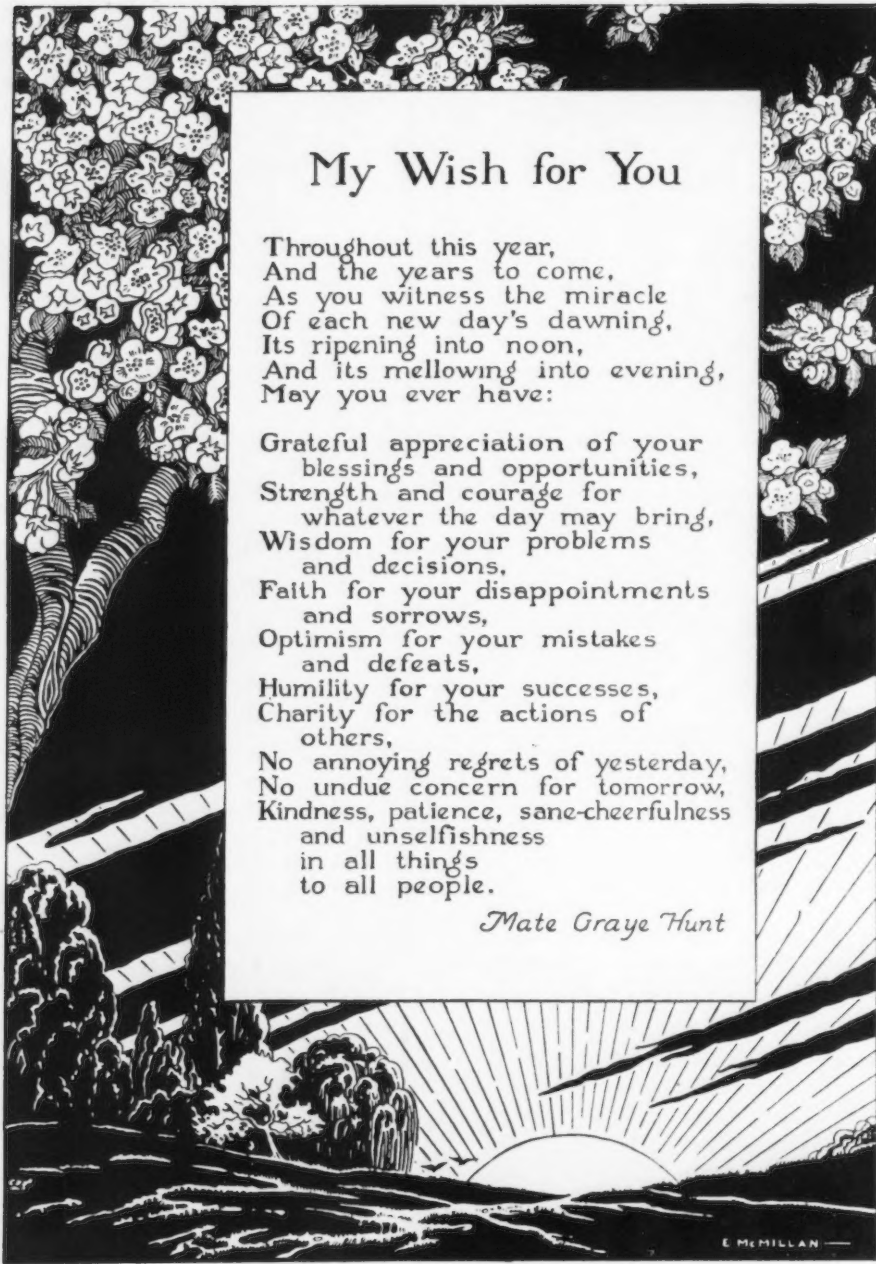
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and decisions,  
Faith for your disappointments  
and sorrows,  
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and defeats,  
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Charity for the actions of  
others,  
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and unselfishness  
in all things  
to all people.

*Mate Graye Hunt*

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# THE ELEMENTARY ENGLISH REVIEW

VOL. XVII

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No. 1

## Literature and Reading

MAY HILL ARBUTHNOT

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**R**EADING AND LITERATURE sometimes mean the same thing, but in the elementary schools the word "reading" is often interpreted to mean the process of learning to read; the drills, the special methods, the remedial techniques. The object of learning to read is of course, a love of good reading of all kinds. Let us look at the two fields, reading and literature, in school and in life.

Last year, during a month's vacation, we were in a summer hotel where there was an unsurpassed opportunity to observe children of all ages reading strictly on their own, without any of the guidance given them in school. The pre-school, or non-reading children, hounded the adults to show them pictures and read aloud to them. The abundance of good pictures from the ten cent stores saved many a rainy day, but painful as the admission may be, the funny papers were prime favorites. The interesting thing about this parent-child activity of looking at the funnies, was the seriousness with which mere babies poured over those incomprehensible comic strips trying to understand them. Long after the adults had departed, worn to the bone answering questions, the children were to

be seen, down on the floor on their stomachs, studying intently those strange pictures. Now the comic-strip may not be ideal reading material, but certainly the comic-strip technique of baiting interest, of keeping the child absorbed in the interpretative process offers a valuable hint to makers of books for beginning readers.

There were also in this hotel, four older children whose reading raised interesting questions. Two brothers from a fine public school system, were evidently high I.Q.s to judge by their ages and grade placement. The ten-year-old read easily and well, yet he never voluntarily opened a book. The other one, eleven, was an omniverous reader, but what was he reading? No desirable books, but a series of detective stories from the pulp magazines, or a loan library. His family could not keep him supplied. There were also two girls from a fine, private, progressive school. One of them, eleven years old, had been slow in learning to read. The teacher told the parents she needed easy material for practice, but did not tell them what to get. As a result, that big, husky eleven-year-old was reading *The Bobbsie Twins* and *The Sunbonnet Babies*. Needless to say, reading

bored her. She took to knitting. The nine-year-old was a rapid, fluent reader, hungry for books. She was also reduced to the same series with such books as the ten cent store afforded. The parents were prosperous people giving the children every physical care and every kind of advantage except guidance in their reading. The girls took riding lessons, swimming lessons, dancing and music lessons. They were having their teeth straightened and their arches arched, but their reading was unguided and a total loss for the summer.

These examples are given in detail, only because they illustrate certain problems that all elementary schools meet. Why do some children leave our classrooms with a permanent distaste for reading; or if they read at all, read only for the crudest kind of thrill, an infinite amount of trash that carries excitement but no beauty? Have we not some responsibility for informing parents about their children's reading needs? Perhaps parents cannot all be made into good guides of their children's reading, but they can be taught to use children's librarians when school is out. Or the schools might well send the children home, the last day, with some book lists, for vacation reading.

To return to the problems in the elementary school, so intense is the modern emphasis on the techniques of teaching children to read that it becomes increasingly difficult for the teacher to keep a sane balance and remember that learning to read is a means to an end. That end is turning out children who genuinely like to read, both for information and for recreation. Now this element of enjoyment we must keep in mind today, because the truth of the matter is, that if people do not like to read they no longer need to read. This is a startling statement

which, a decade ago, would have seemed more heretical than it does now.

Books have recently acquired the most formidable rivals they have ever had, namely, the radio and the moving pictures. These devices are fast making it possible for people who never read a word to be well informed in current events and thoroughly entertained. Let us see what we are getting with these two modern entertainers: current events, book reviews, plays, stories, biographies, world affairs, history, sports, travel, a little science now and then, all to be had without turning a page. The history and biographies may be excellent or they may be spotty and inaccurate, but they are invariably exciting and so they suffice. Science may be perverted to sell some food, or compound, but if it is presented in a lively, authoritative manner it carries conviction.

Certainly, we still need to develop readers. Only the careful reading of a novel enables us to tell how magnificently the moving pictures have presented it, or how painfully it has been fore-shortened. Scientific reading is our best protection against quack salesmen. Reading history is our safest check on news commentators and political spellbinders. So read we should and the schools must go right on struggling with a reading program; but that program must reckon with the powerful appeal of both the radio and the moving pictures. Children love them and use them continually and because of their appeal they make reading more difficult for all except inveterate readers. Can we turn out more inveterate readers? Lacking this reading habit, our out-of-school non-readers will lapse contentedly into the use of moving pictures and radio both for information and for entertainment.

This makes it fairly clear that the pur-

pose of teaching children to read is the same as the basic purpose of literature which is enjoyment. When a fourth grade boy finished Kate Seredy's *Good Master* he put the book down with a sigh and said to his teacher, "That is the best book I ever read in my life. If there were more books like that I should read more."

A kindergarten child was sure that snakes have legs concealed under them, just as caterpillars have. Nothing would dissuade him. The teacher brought in a book on snakes that contained many pictures and much information. She showed the pictures and read the needed information. Later, the children visited the zoo and saw snakes. Only then, was the child persuaded. He looked up at the teacher suddenly with very bright eyes, "That book *did* know," he said and added fervently, "Gee, I must learn to read!"

Here are the two kinds of reading that will make books a permanent source of satisfaction to children; the recreational kind of reading that carries us out of ourselves, that re-creates us because it stirs and thrills us with new delight in life; the other kind of reading, informational reading, where we turn to books to find answers to pressing questions; answers that raise more questions and keep us searching more books.

It is not possible in this brief space to discuss both informational reading and the two major types of literature for children, stories and poems. It is important to remember however, that many children are more easily lured into enjoyment of reading through informational books than through either stories or poetry. Never has there been such a wealth of well written, well printed fact books for all ages. Teachers should know and use such varied types as: *Lasius the Lucky Ant*, *Sea Horse Adventures*, *The Little*

*Toad*, *Child of the Deep*, *Mozart the Wonder Boy*, *Giotto Tended the Sheep*, *Dancing Cloud* and others.

To return to the literature of stories and poetry. If it is to give the children really keen pleasure we must take several facts into consideration. The first is, that *what the child is capable of reading for himself is often no measure of what he is capable of enjoying*, because his reading skill lags behind his comprehension and appreciation. This is always true in the primary grades. There, the vocabulary is so limited of necessity that it in turn, limits the content. To be sure, readers are improving steadily and children genuinely enjoy their reading periods, but the material must of necessity be below their appreciation level because of the mechanical problems involved in the learning-to-read-process. The more retarded the child is in his ability to read, the less his reading material matches his chronological age and social interests.

We obtained some definite evidence of this when we gave an objective test on some literature presented over the radio. These programs reached more than a thousand children and continued over a period of two years. After each semester, we gave some very simple tests to check retention, understanding, and enjoyment of the stories and poetry presented. It was significant to discover that there was little correlation between the lack of reading skill and retention, understanding and enjoyment. All of the material was from one to three years beyond the children's ability to read for themselves, yet the retarded readers were equal to the best readers in retention, understanding, and enjoyment.

This, then is our first principle: *much of the literature children are capable of enjoying lies beyond their reading ability*. Then it follows that our second principle

will be, that *while there is much literature now available that children can read for themselves and heartily enjoy, there is also a great deal of literature that should be presented orally by the adult, the teacher, because the children can enjoy but cannot read it.* Let us illustrate the working of these two principles.

Last autumn, one of our cadets found herself with a group of very dull I-A children. Their work was all on a low level, but their reading was so low as to be almost nil. Moreover, they had learned to dread that period of struggle known as reading. Now it happened that this particular cadet was a born story-teller and children's literature was her special delight. At the advice of the reading specialist she reduced the number and length of reading periods and began saturating the children with stories. No poetry at first! They groaned at the mere mention of it. Something had gone wrong with their first poetry experiences. She told them folk stories; she found drolls that sent them into stitches; she read aloud to them serially, day after day, *Squiggles* (Dorothy Aldis) and *Poppy Seed Cakes* (Marjorie Clark), *Mister Penny* (Marie Hall Ets.) By the way, being able to follow a plot that takes several days to develop and bring to a conclusion is a step forward in appreciation; so we stress the serial reading of three or four books even in the first grade. Early in the morning, these first graders arrived demanding reassurance that there was surely going to be time for a story at the end of the day. They disciplined themselves into a state of seraphic virtue during its progress. Their enjoyment and appreciation of their teacher's artistry in presenting stories was moving. I myself have never seen such a story-hungry mob. Remember, they were poor readers. What they were

able to read was well under their reach in appreciation.

Now what happened? They took better and better literature. The simplest of it was one or two years ahead of their reading ability. They absorbed unconsciously from their gifted teacher, oral characterization in voice, so that their own oral reading reflected it. Moreover, there was an enormous growth in vocabulary and a sudden sprouting of all sorts of questions about all sorts of things. Best of all, these children suddenly saw some reason for reading. They were found pouring over these teacher-presented books between periods, trying to read for themselves. The reading improved by leaps and bounds on less time and drill than they had been having. It was soon possible to increase that drill because there was now a real interest in learning to read.

May I add that hearing words aids children in identifying those words when they see them. Children are more liable to recognize and use words to which their ears have become accustomed.<sup>1</sup>

Since, then, the teacher should present orally much literature throughout the elementary school, she should know how to read aloud well, both poetry and prose, and she should know how to tell stories effectively. You and I used to hear Shakespeare, the Bible, Dickens and a galaxy of poets read aloud. We were used to the sound of great English prose and poetry. Today I am amazed to find college students who have never heard Shakespeare read aloud, or played by a fine company; who know their Shakespeare only with their eyes. Perhaps that is the reason this generation ignores, or dislikes the classics. Hearing Shakespeare played for the first time, a college class remarked, "It was queer, how modern

<sup>1</sup> Camp, Cordelia, "An Oral Reading Program." *Elementary School Journal*. 1931-32, p. 435.



much of that play sounded." By reviving the oral tradition, the reading aloud of fine literature, you can carry children's joy in books far beyond their ability to read for themselves and by so doing keep alive in them an eager desire to read, a faith in books.

One other point in this connection: we have learned the value of pictures as an aid to reading. Pictures actually carry the story in pre-primers before there is a reading vocabulary. However, in the pre-reading period of the nursery school and kindergarten, it is possible that the over-use of the picture-story may retard the child's attention to words. We discovered the four-year-olds, who had been in the nursery school one or two years, had difficulty in following a story told without the aid of pictures. Of course, children love such picture-stories as *Millions of Cats* (Wanda Gag), and the *Angus* series (Marjorie Flack) and they should have them, but it seems reasonable to expect that they should also hear and be able to follow stories of equal simplicity without the help of pictures. So we tell *The Three Pigs*, *Paddy's Three Pets*,<sup>2</sup> *How Spot Found a Home*<sup>3</sup> without illustrations and feel that the child's ability to concentrate on, comprehend, and enjoy the word patterns in these tales is an important step in preparation for reading. Picture-stories, by all means, but parallel with these, let us keep some stories that are told without pictures.

Another essential is that since teachers in the elementary school are chiefly responsible for the selection of children's literature they must know the field thoroughly and be able to judge books by sound standards. Criteria for judging children's books I have stated elsewhere,<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup> *Told Under the Blue Umbrella*—A. E. O., MacMillan.

<sup>3</sup> *Here and Now Story Book*—Lucy Sprague Mitchell.

<sup>4</sup> Arbutnot, M. H., "Purpose and Place of Literature in the Curriculum," *Childhood Education*, October, 1935. "Criteria for Judging Stories for Children," *Childhood Education*, November, 1935.

here I am going to plead for two qualities especially. The first is distinction. Let us agree to omit the trivial, the mediocre, both in poetry and prose. There are hundreds of cute little verses that sometimes tickle the children's ears as popular tunes tickle ours. But in these trivial verses there is nothing of grace, of surprise, of beauty or fun to mull over, to say and love for years to come.

The day before Christmas two little girls sat by my fire. We drank chocolate and ate Christmas cookies, then we told stories and said poems, first one and then the other of us. Instead of some ditty about good old Santa with toys for girls and boys, the six-year-old recited softly all the words of that perfect little poem by Martin Luther,

Away in a manger, no crib for a bed,  
The little Lord Jesus laid down his sweet head.

The stars in the sky looked down where he lay,

The little Lord Jesus asleep on the hay.  
You should have seen that child sitting by the fire, her eyes bright, saying those lovely words softly. The words carry peace with them. They will come back to that child when she is a woman bringing healing and comfort when she needs it. That is what poetry does. That is why we must not allow the cute, the trivial to steal time from poems and stories of permanent beauty. Search for authentic literature at the child's level, literature that has grace and distinction.

The second quality that needs stressing is vigor. We need in the elementary school, literature that is slightly more robust. We are mostly women in the elementary school and we lean toward sweetness and light. Now I do not mean that our choice of literature should be bloody or horrible, although children go straight from our gentle story hours to turn on their favorite radio thriller full

of revolver shots, piercing shrieks and blood-curdling suspense. There is no use pretending our babes are such delicate flowers they cannot stand a shiver up their spines. They positively dote on a good spinal chill. Our problem is to supply fine literature that is exciting rather than let them find excitement only in moving pictures, or radio serials.

The other day I heard a student telling a hearty looking group of second grade children that Czech folk tale, *Smolichcek, the Boy Who Opened the Door*. It is a tale of danger and suspense. The wicked wood maidens get the credulous, disobedient boy. He cries out in his extremity, "Golden Antlers, Golden Antlers, save your poor little Smolichcek." An authentic shiver went up my mature backbone. I heard a small boy breathe hard, a little girl squeaked nervously, every child sat rigid and big-eyed. Then, with the silly Smolichcek perched safely on the back of the Golden Antlers, they sighed gustily with huge satisfaction. We tried this tale gingerly, fearing it might be too scary. It is their favorite; they ask for it over and over again and their response is enthusiastic.

There is no doubt about it; children like plot, a lively theme, action and suspense. Even in the name of social studies it is not legitimate to feed them twaddle. Last year, I opened a picture book for young children. The pictures were so entrancing I was sure the story would be also, but what did I find? Two little children took mother's order to the grocery store, bought all she sent them for and brought the groceries safely home. Now I ask you, does even a Grocery Store Unit justify such thin stuff? No wonder the children take to *Popeye the Sailor* and *Orphan Annie*. Yet every year we read dozens and dozens of such plotless, pointless tales. Better one good fact book on

the grocery store than pseudo stories, flat, stale and unprofitable. I'll wager *Smolichcek* correlates with nothing. Yet *Smolichcek* is guaranteed to revive drooping spirits and make reading something to struggle with.

Now to summarize: if literature is to have a desirable effect on children it must be genuinely enjoyable. Reading is meeting notable competition in the radios and movies and we must keep this competition in mind. If literature is to be challenging we must first find material the children can read and enjoy for themselves and we must also present orally some of the literature these children like but are still incapable of reading. So there will be reading periods and there will also be listening periods. Then, if literature is to grip children as a permanent source of pleasure it must be vigorous and alive. This means that teachers must look for poetry that is authentic and find stories with able-bodied themes and lively plots. Furthermore, we must not sacrifice excellence to novelty. New books make an irresistible appeal and we sometimes drop fine old books that are too good to lose. Thomas Handforth's *Mei Lei* is delightful, but so is *Poppy Seed Cakes* written by Marjorie Clark nearly twenty years ago. Children should enjoy Carol Brink's *Caddie Woodlawn* but they should not miss *Heidi* by Johanna Spyri. In short, let us choose the best of the new books while retaining the finest of the old.

If we do, we shall discover that such literature motivates reading drill, enriches language experiences and stimulates a lively curiosity in many content fields. Moreover, if we can feed children enough first rate literature which they genuinely enjoy, we may keep alive their faith in books and make readers of them in spite of the ever present radio and the powerful appeal of the moving pictures.



# A Read-Aloud Baby Bookshelf

F. MARIE FOSTER

Librarian, Director of Library Training  
State Teachers College  
Kutztown, Pennsylvania

There was an old woman who lived in a shoe,  
She had so many children, she didn't know  
what to do.

*Why didn't she read them poetry and picture books, too?*

POSSIBLY HER budget did not include books. Possibly she was in doubt as to which ones to choose. Modern parents recognize the value of good books for the very youngest child and include books as an item in the household budget. After this commendable budget step has been taken, the next problem looms large, viz, which are the best books to buy for the young child? Parents cannot all be book specialists; therefore it is imperative that from the tremendous number of books published for children they know which will be best to buy for the baby's bookshelf.

Books suggested in this article are merely samples of the many gay, beautifully illustrated books available for children. All the books mentioned are to be read aloud and the pictures shown to the child. Since some household budgets have financial limitations, the read-aloud collection for the baby has been limited to fifty dollars, and the collection does not go beyond the picture book age. A list of aids for selecting still more picture books is given at the end of the article.

Today we often hear parents and teachers say, "Oh, children just don't like poetry." In reply we might ask: Are parents, teachers and librarians making poetry available for children? Are we singing poetry with children? Are we reading poetry with pictures? Thus we place at the beginning of the baby shelf:

## POETRY AND NURSERY RHYMES

*Child's Garden of Verses.* By Robert Louis Stevenson. Illus. by J. W. Smith. Scribner. \$1.50

*Four and Twenty Blackbirds.* Comp. by Helen Dean Fish. Illus. by Robert Lawson. Stokes. \$1.50

*The Little Mother Goose.* Illus. by Jessie Wilcox Smith. Dodd. \$1.50

*Real Mother Goose.* Illus. by B. F. Wright. Rand. \$2.00

*Silver Pennies.* Comp. by Blanche J. Thompson. Macmillan. \$1.00

*Tom Twist.* By William A. Butler. Holiday House. \$1.00

*'Twas the Night Before Christmas.* By Clement C. Moore; Illus. by J. W. Smith. Houghton. \$1.00

*When We Were Very Young.* By Alexander A. Milne. Dutton. \$1.00

## POETRY AND NURSERY RHYMES WITH PICTURES AND MUSIC

*The Baby's Opera.* By Walter Crane. Warne. \$1.50

*Fourteen Songs from "When We Were Very Young."* By Harold Fraser-Simson; Illus. by E. H. Shepard. Dutton. \$2.00

*Songs From Many Lands.* By Thomas W. Surette. Houghton. \$2.50. "Seventy-four songs with simple piano accompaniment for children to sing in the home."

*The Songs We Sing.* By Hendrik W. Van Loon. Musical arrangement by Grace Castagnetta. Simon and Schuster. \$1.00  
Twenty-five nursery songs with music.

Beloved by every child are his first ABC books. The four selected here bring to children a distinct variety of illustration and charming associations for his first acquaintance with the alphabet.

## ABC BOOKS

*ABC Book.* By Charles B. Falls. Doubleday. \$1.50

*ABC Bunny.* By Wanda Gag. Coward-McCann. \$2.00

*An Alphabet for Boys and Girls.* By Rachel Field. Doubleday. 75c.

*A Apple Pie.* By Kate Greenaway. Warne. \$1.50

Dorothy Lathrop and the Petershams contribute picture books of unusual distinction to use in introducing the "greatest book" to the youngest child.

*Animals of the Bible.* A picture book by D. P. Lathrop; with text selected by H. D. Fish from the King James Bible. Stokes. \$2.00

*The Christ Child.* Illus. by Maud and Miska Petersham. Doubleday. \$2.00. "As told by Matthew and Luke."

Specialists in children's reading agree that young children delight in a story full of action. The story book group listed is chuck full of happenings and the pictures act all the way through. In size the story picture books range from the very tiny to the very large; Mrs. May Lamberton Becker lovingly describes them as "two laps and little bits."<sup>1</sup>

#### PICTURE STORY BOOKS

*And to Think That I Saw It On Mulberry Street.* By Theodor S. Geisel. Vanguard. \$1.00

*Andy and the Lion.* By James H. Daugherty. Viking. \$1.50

*Angus and the Ducks.* By Marjorie Flack. Doubleday. \$1.00

*Aunt Green, Aunt Brown, and Aunt Lavendar.* By Elsa Beskow. Harper. \$2.50

*Clever Bill.* By William Nicholson. Doubleday. \$1.00

*Five Chinese Brothers.* By Claire H. Bishop. Illus. by Kurt Wiese. Coward-McCann. \$1.50

*Golden Goose Book.* By Leslie Brooke. Warne. \$3.00. Contents: Golden Goose; Three Bears; Three Little Pigs; Tom Thumb.

*Hey Diddle Diddle Picture Book.* By Randolph Caldecott. Warne. \$2.25. Paper 60c. Contents: Milk Maid, Hey Diddle Diddle, Baby Bunting, Fox Jumps Over the Parson's Gate, Frog He Would A-Wooing Go.

<sup>1</sup> Becker, May Lamberton. *First Adventures in Reading.* Stokes, 1936. p. 26.

*Johnny Crow's Garden.* By Leslie Brooke. Warne. \$1.00

*Little Tim and the Brave Sea Captain.* By Edward Ardizzone. Oxford. \$2.00

*Millions of Cats.* By Wanda Gag. Coward-McCann. \$1.50

*Pelle's New Suit.* By Elsa Beskow. Harper. \$1.50

*Story of Babar the Little Elephant.* By Jean de Brunhoff, Trans. from the French by Merle Haas. Random House. \$1.00

*Story of Ferdinand.* By Munro Leaf. Illus. by Robert Lawson. Viking. \$1.00

*Story of Little Black Sambo.* By Helen Bannerman. Stokes. 50c.

*The Tale of Peter Rabbit.* By Beatrix Potter. Warne. 75c.

For further suggestions on books for the youngest child consult:

#### STILL MORE

*First Adventures in Reading.* By May Lamberton Becker. Stokes. \$2.00

Chapter I—Singing to the Baby; II—The First Joy—The Delight of Recognition; III—Two Laps and Little Bits. Lists of books recommended at end of each chapter.

*First Experiences With Literature.* By Alice Dalgliesh. Rev. ed. Scribner. \$1.00  
Chapter III—Picture Books and their Makers.

*Seven Stories High, The Child's Own Library.* Compton's Pictured Encyclopedia. "Unique descriptive list of books that children should grow up with, arranged to fit the seven age spans of childhood and prepared to assist parents, and children in selecting the right books for the home library."

The books mentioned in the "Still More" group will also prove helpful as the child outgrows the picture book age and develops new reading tastes. The children's book world is fortunate in having outstanding specialists like Alice Dalgliesh, Anne Eaton, Mary Gould Davis, May Lamberton Becker and others reviewing current children's books each month. By following these reviews we can intelligently select the best current

# Life Lines In Language Work\*

HOWARD R. DRIGGS

*Professor of English Education, New York University*

**A** FEW TANGIBLES about which to think and to talk will help direct this discussion towards practical outcomes. Those I plan to present briefly link closely with language life lines, and apply definitely to the work of our elementary schools. To give still sharper focus, I shall rule out at this time other vital phases of language training, and center on this question: *What are the net results coming from the elementary schools in the form of written English and why?*

An investigation has been carried on quietly through recent years to help us get a concrete answer to this basic question. More than two hundred thousand compositions written on a vital subject within the experiences of all boys and girls—"The Cost of Carelessness"—have been gathered. Grades four to twelve inclusive in every type of school in some twenty different states are represented in the product.

Teachers working in groups and individually have made and are making careful study of the results of this nationwide survey. The compositions, particularly those of elementary and junior high school grades, have been repeatedly rated according to a simple, but reliable scale devised by well-trained teacher-students out of the compositions themselves.

Briefly described, the scale is made up of type compositions representing varying merit, and graded as A-B-C-D-E.

The A grade samples are alive, unified, and free from errors of a serious kind.

The B grade has life, but is somewhat inaccurate in sentence structure, word choice and usage.

The C grade is more of a matter-of-fact statement with errors of a commonplace cast.

The D grade is dull, shows a decided lack of sentence sense and a blundering use of words.

The E grade is immature, often a jumble of words, and contains crude errors. It indicates low intelligence or other serious handicap.

What is of moment to teachers of elementary schools as revealed by this nationwide survey? A complete statement covering the returns cannot be given within our limited time. A glimpse of the whole picture may be had, however, from these significant results. According to careful ratings made by groups of teacher-students, the beginning seventh grade compositions show: A made 8%; B, 22%; C, 33%; D, 27%; E, 12%. Stated otherwise this indicates that 41% of the pupils on entering our junior high schools, fall within the D-E group; that one-third, the C grade, can do only mediocre work; that more than one-fifth of the compositions—those of B grade—are marred by inaccuracies. Granting that the survey cited is far from a complete or perfect picture of the whole situation, are not these returns still a rather serious indictment of the English work in the first six grades?

What happens in the seventh and eighth grades? The answer in part may be found in the ratings given compositions produced by pupils at the beginning of their ninth year. These show: A grade 12%; B, 25%; C, 35%; D, 21%; E, 8%.

\* Digest of an address before the Elementary Section of The National Council of Teachers of English, Nov. 25, 1939.

Some improvement is evidenced here. Whether the more favorable returns are due in a measure to the loss during these years of a greater percentage of pupils of the lower intelligence or handicapped group, remains to be determined. Disregarding this factor, however, we still have at the beginning of the ninth grade 29% of D-E pupils; more than one-third doing commonplace or C grade work; and one-fourth in the B grade, whose written English is marked by disconcerting inaccuracies. Are these satisfactory results?

More vital still: What are the fundamental and the removable causes for such returns? The answer to this constructive question must be sought, first of all, in the teaching practices common in our elementary schools.

For a number of years it has been sought there by those qualified to make a fair appraisal of the work being done by teachers there in the language field. Out of all their observations has come at least one basic conclusion: there is too much uncertainty in elementary language teaching. The general condition that obtains seems to be aptly suggested by the remark of one teacher, who, when asked what method she followed in teaching language, said frankly, "The hit and miss method." Then she added, with a smile, "I guess I miss more often than I hit."

What may be found going on in the various classes is sketched by these notes an observer made during an informal visit: "First grade: Pupils talking interestedly about a bird's nest one had brought to class—lesson abruptly changed to an unrelated drill on word recognition. Second grade: Pupils recalling a story of mediocre cast about a fox and a turtle and a rabbit going to market, and attempting an informal dramatizing of the same. Third grade: A

formalistic lesson on capitals and periods, sentences taken from a book being copied. Fourth grade: Reading a story silently and testing for results, the teacher reading questions on the story and pupils checking words indicative of their interpretation. Percentages of correctness afterwards given with teacher comment before the whole class. One result seemed to be the cultivation of a superiority and an inferiority complex. Fifth grade: Vibrant and truly motivated lesson on real letter writing. An admirable blending of form with content to the practical purpose of producing letters which were to be mailed. Sixth grade: Formal lesson on common and proper nouns, closing, after some confusion in the minds of the pupils, with this final word from the teacher: "Just remember, if the noun begins with a capital letter, it is a proper noun."

This report of actual classroom activities may or may not be a fair picture of the teaching of language in our elementary schools. One thing, however, is evident: there is entirely too much guess work in the process. Teachers are commonly in a state bordering on bewilderment in this fundamental work. They are trying earnestly, and generally speaking, they have their pupils well in hand. Moreover, at times they will lead the boys and girls through purposeful and interesting exercises and activities. Occasionally, the language lesson will show the one instance just cited, a clear understanding of what the work is all about.

A serious lack of certainty however in plans and teaching procedures still marks most of the English work in the elementary schools.

What are the sources of all this language teaching uncertainty? It is not, we feel sure, due to general teaching ineffectiveness; because more teachers than



ever before are showing skill in their class-work. The main cause of the confusion, as frequently pointed out by frank leaders in the field, is to be found in the unsettled struggle between the formalists and the expressionists. All the evidence gathered through appreciative observation in the elementary English classes tends to support this conclusion. Within the same school on any one day one is likely to find work of a formalistic cast—dry unmotivated drills—going on side by side with that of the superactivity, or expressionistic, type. Even in the same classroom during a given language lesson the two types may at times be seen, with no relation between the two.

All this indicates that the old principle of "learn to do by doing" is being either overdone or underdone. Advocates of the "accuracy first" slogan, and those of the "fluency first" watchword may be found in varying numbers and in combination. Have we forgotten that there are two basic elements in the sound suggestion, "Learn to do by doing"? The inner meaning of that time-tested principle might be better understood if put in this form: *We should learn to do while we are doing.*

A second main cause of the uncertainty that exists is to be found in the untenable textbook situation. Some schools, in response to modernistic notions have been amply supplied with a variety of texts, from which the teachers are expected to select their own lesson materials and shape them into a well-ordered course. Other schools, pinched for funds, are supplied with but one book, of either the super-activity or of the sheer formalistic type. Still others are provided with no text at all, relying on a generalistic course of study, and depending on the teachers to fill in the outline with rich and well-adapted lesson materials. Added to all

this confusion, there is a constant call for change, aided and abetted by prolific publishers, who have evidently adopted the slogan of automobile manufacturers, "Keep 'em dissatisfied." As a result, one main factor that seems to determine the selection of new texts is the date of copyright.

Whether the foregoing statement sketches a fairly accurate picture of the general situation as it obtains today in the language work of the elementary schools, teachers in service must decide for themselves. On one essential, however, I feel sure we shall find no serious disagreement: there is vital need to reduce the complications that now characterize our plans, our tools, and our teaching procedures. Such a reduction can come only as we bring the work back to basic principles and follow productive life lines.

The thrifty orchardist knows that to get marketable fruit from his trees he must keep them well-pruned. Our language work, taken in the large, suggests a tree that has been permitted to grow all the limbs, twigs, and leaves it could bear. Expression and activity we are getting in abundance, but too little fruit, and much of that of inferior quality. There is just one way to correct this unsatisfactory condition; and that is to prune away the dead and unfruitful limbs from our English work and get it back to simpler, more fruitful procedures.

After all is said and done language teaching need not be a complicated process. In essence all we can possibly do for a pupil is to help him find something to say and help him to say it well. This means that the teacher's main business is to create conditions wherein the young learner will feel impelled, not compelled to express himself, not someone else; and also that she train him to

bring out his contribution clearly, correctly, convincingly. It is, in brief, discovery, development, and drill based on the pupil's revealed language needs.

The continuing controversy between the "accuracy first" and the "fluency first" folk would be speedily concluded if they would adopt this slogan: *Fluency with accuracy*. Nature provides us with ample illustrations showing the close relationship between form and content. One cannot, for example, grow corn without growing husks; yet it is not the straw and the chaff, but rather the wheat we most desire. In a like sense, all expression of thought, feeling, and life experiences may be expressed only through forms. So far as language goes, thought expression always calls for words aptly chosen, for skill in sentence building; for distinct enunciation and correct spelling.

What is needed today is better teamwork on the part of teachers in the elementary schools to train pupils in these essentials. Such a concert of effort will be brought about only as we lift into the clear the basic objectives of our work—only as we prune away the non-essentials and get down to the life lines in language. A little common sense research right in the classrooms, conducted under helpful guidance, would help to lift fundamental language needs of pupils at various grade levels into the clear; a frank facing of teaching procedures would serve to clear away unfruitful methods. Out of all this practical study would come a more definite, yet flexible, plan of action—one that would give surer guidance to the teachers, and help them to bring more satisfactory returns from their earnest labors.

#### A READ-ALoud BABY BOOKSHELF

(Continued from page 10)

books for our young people, even though we do not have access to bookstores for examination and evaluation. A list of the periodicals to which some of these reviewers contribute follows:

*Child Life*—Mary Gould Davis.

*New York Herald Tribune Books*—May Lamberton Becker.

*Parents Magazine*—Alice Dalgliesh.

*New York Times Book Review*—Anne Eaton.

To those who murmur, "Children's books are so expensive," we would answer, "Yes, but do you not want the best for your child?" Clara Whitehill Hunt illustrates this side of the picture book very forcefully in her introduction to *The*

*First Three Hundred Books for the Children's Library*.<sup>2</sup>

"If you went to a grocer to buy the best food for your child and the man scoffed at your putting the money into a bottle of Grade A milk when he could give you a barrel of sawdust for the same money, would you take the sawdust? Shelves full of cheap trash are exactly as good nourishment for children's minds and souls as sawdust is for their bodies." Through the home, school and public libraries we can give joy to little children and provide channels through which they can grow with good literature.

<sup>2</sup> Hunt, Clara Whitehill. *The First Three Hundred Books for the Children's Library*. University of the State of New York Press, 1933. p. 4.



# A Child's Sense of Humor<sup>\*</sup>

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NOTHING IS MORE important in the social education of the individual than a sense of humor. In everyday contacts it is more necessary than correct sentence structure or a knowledge of the multiplication table, yet it is rarely ever developed or emphasized. Many tense situations have been relieved because a sense of humor has left the individual free to attack the problem without emotional strain. In spite of all this, what actually constitutes a keen sense of humor is difficult to define, for there are shades and qualities of humor suiting the tastes and temperaments of all types of people. As Stephen Leacock says, "What laughter is and why it is and what is a joke and why it is a joke, all these things remain unknown and unascertained. In a world that teaches everything that can be taught, humor alone remains an unexplored field." (1)<sup>†</sup> Considering the importance of an appreciation of humor, should we assume that all children have a native sense of humor and can appreciate the situations which adults find humorous, or should we endeavor to find what the child considers funny and try to develop his appreciation of humor? Most children have a clean and kindly sense of humor; but often contact with adults has spoiled this, leaving in its place a mean and sordid type.

There are various standard types which adults consider humorous. Frequently we judge a child's sense of humor by adult standards and cannot understand why he

does not appreciate the book we consider humorous. Most adults appreciate the humor of exaggeration and of comic portraiture which emphasizes the national peculiarities of simplicity, penury, and cautiousness. Puns, allegory, satire, and irony are some more subtle types of humor enjoyed by adults. These are the criteria by which we judge a child's sense of humor and by which we label him lacking in appreciation when he does not come up to our standards.

The child, however, views life from an entirely different angle; to him "nothing is quite so funny as to see what a thing should be and at the same time how far it has gone astray." (2) He must be able to place himself in the situation and visualize how he would have acted in similar circumstances. The child with the more vivid imagination and keener intelligence has, without a doubt, a better opportunity to see the difference between what the situation is and what it should be and then to make the comparison.

In this study I have endeavored to find out what circumstances and situations fourth grade children who are comparatively slow readers consider funny. By determining the situations which have amused the children it will be possible to develop this interest. Perhaps then it will not be necessary to leave the training of the child's sense of humor to the funny papers and slapstick comedy.

In order that there might be an opportunity for even the slowest readers to have a choice of materials, books were selected which ranged in reading difficulty from second to fifth grade level.

<sup>\*</sup> Study made under the supervision of Dr. John P. Milligan, State Teachers College, Newark, New Jersey.

<sup>†</sup> Parenthetical numbers refer to items in the bibliography, page 27.

Variety makes such an appeal to the children that I arranged to have a complete new set of fifteen books every four weeks renewing only those books which have been especially requested. In addition to the books changed every four weeks there were the more familiar children's classics on the library table.

Following is a list of the books used and the number of pupils who read each book. The books starred were on the library table all year, the remainder were there for a period of four consecutive weeks.

	No. reading book		
	Boys	Girls	Total
*Adventures of a Brownie— D. M. Craik. Lippincott.	4	9	13
*Alice in Wonderland— L. Carroll. Macmillan.	6	6	12
Araminta's Goat— M. L. Hunt. Putnam.	5	7	12
Beppo the Donkey— Rhea Wells. Doubleday, Doran.	6	5	11
Benjie's Hat— Mabel L. Hunt. Stokes.	6	8	14
Black Eyed Susan— E. C. Phillips. Houghton Mifflin.	2	2	4
Blaze and Forest Fire— C. W. Anderson. Macmillan.	9	6	15
Bruin, the Brown Bear— Lida. Harper.	7	6	13
Book of Mah Wee— G. P. Moon. Doubleday, Doran.	8	6	14
Charlie and His Puppy, Bingo— Hill and Maxwell. Macmillan.	9	12	21
Down, Down, the Mountain— E. Credle. Nelson.	12	13	25
Frag— Annie V. Weaver. Stokes.	11	10	21
Gone is Gone— Wanda Gag. Coward McCann.	13	15	28
Greedy Goat— E. L. Brock. Knopf.	13	12	25
*Grimms' Fairy Tales— Brothers Grimm. Ginn.	10	14	24
Hester and Timothy, Pioneers— R. L. Holberg. Doubleday.	5	4	9
House at Pooh Corner— A. A. Milne. Dutton.	2	6	8
Jerome Anthony— Mrs. E. K. Evans. Putnam.	8	11	19
Little Jack Rabbit— Alice Dussauze. Macmillan.	9	10	19
Little Old Woman Who Used Her Head— N. H. Newell. Nelson.	6	14	20
Little Machinery— Liddell. Doubleday.	7	6	13
Lonesomest Doll— A. F. Brown. Houghton Mifflin.	7	9	16
Mick and Mac— Paul Brown. Scribner.	10	7	17

\* Remained on library table all year.

	No. reading book		
	Boys	Girls	Total
Midget and Bridget—Berta & Elmer— Hader. Macmillan.	10	4	14
Mister Penny— M. H. Ets. Viking.	12	7	19
Mitty on Mr. Syrup's Farm— R. L. Holberg. Doubleday.	10	11	21
Nicodemus and His New Shoes— Inez Hogan. Dutton.	14	16	30
Nicodemus and the Little Black Pig— Inez Hogan. Dutton.	14	13	27
Peter Pea— N. R. Grishina. Stokes.	3	8	11
Picture Rhymes from Foreign Lands— Rose Fyleman. Stokes.	6	12	18
*Peter Pan and Wendy— J. M. Barrie. Ginn.	10	12	22
*Reynard the Fox— Sidney Firman. Winston.	15	16	31
Saturday Magic— Karsten. Scribner.	2	6	8
Secret Cave— Everson. Dutton.	8	6	14
Scuff the Seal— Lida. Harper.	10	6	16
Shorty— N. Grishina. Stokes.	9	11	20
Smoky, the Lively Locomotive— Lois Donaldson. A. Whitman.	11	8	19
Sophie— Madam DeSegur. Knopf.	5	6	11
Story of the Live Dolls— E. Gates. Bobbs-Merrill.	3	11	14
Story of Mrs. Tubbs— H. Lofting. Stokes.	11	13	24
Smiths and Rusty— A. Dalglish. Scribner.	5	6	11
The Curly-Haired Hen— A. Vimar. Grosset & Dunlap.	6	8	14
The Cave Twins— L. Perkins. Houghton Mifflin.	5	4	9
The Little Girl Who Curtsied— M. Baker. Dodd Mead.	2	7	9
The Little Wooden Doll— M. W. Bianco. Macmillan.	6	13	19
The Silver Bear— Brown. Lothrop.	4	8	12
The Story of Dr. Doolittle— Hugh Lofting. Stokes.	9	6	15
Wee Gillis— Munro Leaf. Viking.	15	13	28
Winnie the Pooh— A. A. Milne. Dutton.	4	7	11
Wings for the Smiths— A. Dalglish. Scribner.	8	8	16

When the child finished the book he was asked to fill out the following form:

Child's Name

Name of Book

What I thought was funny

Why I thought it funny

In addition to this check, I kept track of the situations in their group reading which the children found humorous.

The children with whom I worked were mostly Italians whose parents have been educated in the United States but whose grandparents still speak Italian. There were a few whose parents came directly from Italy. The remainder of the class were American, colored, and mostly on the lower economic level. Their intelligence was average or below average and their reading ability varied from second to fifth grade level. There were fifteen boys and seventeen girls.

By analyzing the reports that the children made of their reading, and discussing the report with each child, I found the situations the children thought funny could be readily classified into the following groups:

1. Situations which the child himself had experienced and in which he could readily imagine himself acting in the same manner. No matter how unusual the circumstance, however, it must have a happy ending or in the child's mind it ceases to be funny.
2. Situations in which animals, birds or insects did things the children never expected them to be able to do; situations in which animals acted or spoke like human beings.
3. Situations including an unexpected outcome, such as rain at a picnic or sudden change in action. But here again there must be a happy ending.
4. Some found any action of either children or animals funny which was exaggerated, but preferred it when it was not too highly imaginative.
5. Any stories of toys that were animated and had exciting experiences that were within the grasp of the child's imagination.

The most popular books were those that were a year below the level of the child's reading ability. It seemed to make

little difference whether there were colored pictures or not. When just thumbing through the books the illustrated ones were the most popular, but when a child decided to read a book it made little difference whether there were many pictures or not. The content was more important.

An interesting outcome of the emphasis placed on humor in books was the gradual disappearance of books of funnies which the children usually bring to school. When I had seen none for about a week I inquired which the children preferred, the funnies or books of funny stories. Even taking into consideration the child's natural desire to please the teacher, their reasons for preferring the books were very enlightening. Following are the reasons most frequently given for the preference of the books.

1. In funny papers the story is never finished, you always have to wait for the next day for the adventures.
2. Books are more realistic. The funny pictures are made up.
3. When you read funnies there is nothing to think about, for the pictures are never true and could never happen.
4. Not enough reading in the funnies—no new words.
5. Animals do funnier things in the books than in the funnies.
6. Funnies all about history and men and very little about children.
7. Most funnies too silly.
8. More action in the books than in the funnies.
9. A lot more funny parts in the books than in the funnies.
10. You can read books over again and still see the funny parts. It is a waste of money to buy comic pictures

# Introducing English To A Bilingual Majority Group

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**B**ILINGUALISM IS commonly defined as having, or using, two languages. It may refer to foreign groups of people in the total population or to individuals capable of conversing in two tongues.

In the United States, English is the predominant language of communication in the social and business worlds. However, bilingualism is an important educational problem in many urban and rural sections of the United States and its possessions.

In the majority of our cities and rural areas, bilingual children constitute a minority group. As such, they are in constant and immediate contact with an English thinking, speaking and reading majority. The presentation of English is not confined to the teacher, but is assisted and stimulated by the children's associates and environment.

The writer has, however, chosen to treat the problem of introducing English to bilingual majority groups, whose environment offers few opportunities for, or stresses the need of, the employment of English. Very frequently, in such a situation, the teaching of English is believed justifiable only on the unstable basis of "postponed purpose."

It often happens that the English teacher is, wholly or partially, unfamiliar with the native tongue of the pupils. Communication is, of course, essential to any teaching procedure, and, where vocal sound alone stimulates no response, sound must be coupled with activities common to the lives and interests of the children.

In supplying children with materials and experience situations through which they can express themselves, the teacher is offering them a new ability to communicate and act, and she is enabling them to act successfully, through their understanding of, and proper association of the activity with a few well-chosen words.

The second language should be related as closely as possible to activities which children regard as purposeful. English should serve as the contributor to the activity's success, rather than as an end for which the activity is initiated. The meaning of the majority of English words which young children acquire prior to their introduction to the reading of English, should come through the direct association of them with experience. The more vivid the experience, the more closely will the word or word-sequence be linked to it.

Where the schoolroom replaces the home in the development of language, it should provide an environment rich in the materials which contribute to, and emphasize, the interests of young children. It is natural for children to wish to explore and acquaint themselves with the possibilities of a room and they should be allowed the freedom to do this. Their natural curiosity may be satisfied with simple explanations, often only one or two words in English.

The schoolroom should be equipped with materials which challenge the exploratory instincts. It should provide play materials, pictures, globes, maps,



signs, clay, finger paint, painting materials, and easel. The room itself should contribute to interests closely related to children: fish in a bowl; a live kitten to care for; a star map; various kinds of plants to be arranged and watered; a wash board, tubs, iron; a table and dishes; balls. These items may serve as focal points for individual or group activities. It might be well not to present too many new things for the children to adjust to at one time. The room should offer a sufficiently familiar environment for the children to make a rapid adjustment to it.

Children should be encouraged to contribute to the school environment. The contributions may be permanent, such as plants, pictures, stones, and shells, or they may be temporary, such as pets and toys. Contributions which are close to the individual child and his interests will make for a stronger English word association when he shares them with his teacher and his group.

Group excursions will also contribute to the enlargement and enrichment of the school environment, bringing into it from the out-of-doors many common and new things which the children may arrange and learn the English names for. The school room, or English room will, itself become a part of the children's experiences, because of their participation in making it what it is.

It is the purpose of the teacher to build upon and unify the natural interests of her pupils, and, at the same time, to permit them as much latitude as the group or individual demands. The young child's interests may be expected to center in his home, his garden, his neighbors, his town, the store, the street, Don Carlos's hacienda. In discussion groups which use his native language, he will probably be unifying and broadening these centers of interest. Therefore, in bringing these

subjects into her classroom, the English teacher is not building alone. Her work will add to the foundation of child experience and knowledge. In this type of English teaching, there is no resorting to the inactivity or drill method of teaching which devitalizes all learning, and most especially the learning of a second language, and thus cheats the learning process of its functional benefits.

Perhaps, as it is so important in the initial presentation of a language to associate the word with experience, the English teacher's part of the teaching program may include much of the construction work usually carried on in the elementary activity program. Relatively few words need be, or should be used by the teacher in guiding the children toward satisfactory outcomes in their activities. However, these words will, through repetition and association, pattern themselves in the children's oral expression. In the construction of a barn, for example, the child may not be familiar with the English words for such articles as hammer, saw, nails, boards, but he is quick to recognize the purposes to which they may be employed. Therefore, the construction of a barn provides numerous learning situations to which English words may be attached and to whose success they may contribute. Pictures of constructive activities engaged in by the group or individual may later serve as a recall of experience and may motivate simple discussions.

Rhymes, games and singing are natural pleasures of young children. Pantomime may be a valuable accompaniment to many of the games, rhymes, and songs used, but it should not be so emphasized that it supplants the word associations. Common examples are:

(Played as a mimic game with a child leader.)

I clap my hands like this. (Clapping hands rapidly)

I clap my hands like this.

I clap my hands like this, this, this. (Very rapidly)

I clap my hands like this.

As small children enjoy executing simple commands in play form, the game above, may be worked out in this manner.

Clap your hands. Clap your hands.  
Clap your hands as fast as you can.  
Clap your hands. Clap your hands as slowly as you can.  
Shake your hands. Shake your hands.  
Shake your hands as slowly as you can.  
Shake your hands. Shake your hands.  
Shake your hands as fast as you can.

One word commands, such as go, stand, sit, run, walk etc. with a child leader naming the activity, are also enjoyed.

"Who comes knocking at my door?" is another action game which children enjoy. One child turns his back to the room, and the teacher or a child leader signals to another child to leave the room. This child knocks at the door, and the child who is "it" turns around and asks, "Who is knocking at my door? Is it Rosa?" If the child's guess is correct, the group of children replies, "Yes, it is Rosa." If the child's guess is not correct, the group makes a negative reply.

"Did you ever see a lassie?" is another game which offers dramatized action and which children like to play. Its words may be changed to meet various situations.

Many songs, games, and rhymes are related to unit activities. Examples are the "The Farmer in the Dell" and "Oats, Peas, Beans and Barley Grow" which may be used in connection with the study of the farm.

Counting in his own language is probably part of the child's experience. The transfer can be made to the second language through such activities as seeing how many times the child can bounce a ball, jump a rope, hit a nail on the head, catch a ball.

Words of praise accompanying the successful performance of any of these activities, or any repeated explanation or

courtesy connected with their performance, are usually quickly and easily included in the child's vocabulary.

With small children, cleanliness is an important part of their learning activities, and it is closely related to the materials with which they are working. Their hands require frequent washings. Words such as water, soap, clean, bath, wash pan, towel, tooth brush, dirty, comb, teeth, finger-nails, wash, dry, become part of the child's vocabulary through a functional repetition of actual experience. The vocabulary development of these words may be strengthened by pictures of these activities made by the children and placed on the bulletin board. Children also enjoy games which pantomime these activities. A "What Am I Doing?" game pantomimed by an individual child and guessed by the group, or a game such as "New Orleans,"<sup>1</sup> where two groups participate in dramatizing and guessing.

The more oral English which the young bilingual child can master before he comes to the reading of English, the less difficulty he will have in reading. A functional vocabulary of at least three hundred to five hundred words is desirable. At first the child's reading of English should be an outgrowth of his own experiences. The experience type of reading enables the teacher to control vocabulary and insures a repetition of known words in written form.

To sum up, we may say that the English vocabulary of a young child should consist of English words which are of the most practical value to him in his activities in the English classroom. The

<sup>1</sup> New Orleans is played by two groups of children, one group secretly deciding upon and dramatizing a common activity which the other group tries to guess. If the group guesses correctly the other group tries to run back to its base without any member being caught by the other side. The words are,  
"Here we come."  
"Where are you from?"  
"We are from New Orleans."  
"What is your trade?"  
"Lemonade."  
"Get to work and show us some."



activities of the English classroom should not be isolated from the activities engaged in, in other classes, but should contribute to the child's natural development and to the entire school program.

The writer has been speaking primarily of the introduction of young children to the English language. There is, however, as in Puerto Rico, a large group of bilingual children in the later elementary grades, who, although they have some acquaintance with written English, are unable to speak English with facility, or to understand it without great effort and frequent frustrations. The English teacher who is new to the situation is inclined to rely upon the child's six or seven year background of unfunctional English as being sufficient for a comprehension of English almost equal to that of the English speaking children in the United States. She is, however, overlooking the limited extent to which English has been employed in the functional sense.

To cite a personal experience, the writer began her first class of English with a bilingual group of seventh graders. She opened her class with a description of her voyage from New York City to Puerto Rico. The pupils' first reaction, upon hearing her speak, was laughter. The English language, as produced by an English speaking person was as foreign to them as French or German is to an American school child. After the novelty of the new sounds had worn off, only a few children were able to maintain poses of attentiveness, despite the watchful eye of the school principal.

The writer was, however, speaking to the children upon a subject which would have been of interest to them had they been able to understand. Their understanding would have been increased if she had used maps, pictures, and other graphic materials which might have pro-

vided the pupils with an insight into what she was saying. Such an approach would have transferred pupil-attention and interest from the curious flow of sound to a medium of communication which they could understand.

Perhaps the most instructive incident which occurred during the writer's first class period with bilingual pupils, was occasioned by her need for a drink. She asked for water in the customary way, but there was no response. Then she resorted to dramatization. The pupils were delighted at their ability to understand. "Tiene sed," they exclaimed. "Agua!" The word *agua* was definitely imprinted on the teacher's mind, and her emphasis on the word *water* made a similar impression upon the pupils.

Speaking slowly and distinctly is important with such a group, and, if it does not consume too much time, a presentation of part of the written form with the spoken. Key words which belong to the child's silent reading vocabulary, help him to construct the thought of the spoken sentences. Contractions frequently prove confusing.

With this group of children periods of inactive listening should be extremely short until they have sufficiently accustomed themselves to the spoken words to understand with little conscious effort. Prolonged listening with no pupil-response, may develop in the pupils habits of passive listening to words.

With the co-operation of a teacher speaking their own tongue, this more mature group of pupils may, on the opening day, be given an opportunity to feel their way into the English classroom environment by having collected on a long table an assortment of materials to be used in connection with English activities. These materials may be various to meet the range of individual interests, and may

include piles of books with bookends within easy reach; old magazines, fiction, scientific, nature, current events; pots of flowers; pictures to be hung and pictures with English subtitles to be placed on the bulletin board; maps; art materials; parts of an airplane to be assembled; picture puzzles; games. Such an activity will give the pupils a feeling of security, and will fill the room, for them, with known possibilities. It will do much to destroy the resentment toward an English which is confined to unattractive series of basic readers.

Too frequently this group of children receives its knowledge of English and English speaking peoples entirely through these basic reader series. As we no longer confine the reading done by children in the United States to one or two groups of books, and, as many of the series of readers used in the northern states are not regarded as suitable for use in the southern states, it cannot be expected that these books can meet very successfully the reading needs of children remote from the United States, or even of isolated groups of bilingual children within the United States. The practice of moving up lower grade readers for use in the higher grades because of their more simplified vocabulary, is most certainly not desirable from an interest standpoint. Studies have shown that children's reading interests are more affected by chronological age than by any other single factor. Therefore, many of the stories which appear in the fourth grade readers will be disqualified for use in the sixth grade on an age basis.

Hosking's study of children's reading interests mentions a group of books which has a wide age range of interest appeal for children. Many of these books are simple in their vocabulary and sentence patterns. Hosking suggests that

they might be useful with remedial groups. Such a list of books would merit study to determine their suitability for the bilingual child. At least it may be assumed that a variety of books and reading materials will offer more stimulation for a bilingual reading group to read and discuss, than reading confined to series books.

The motion picture is another field which may be profitably used by the English teacher of bilingual children. Often the school system owns, or has the use of, a motion picture machine. Usually the explanatory text which accompanies the picture is in English. If this is true, a visual lesson can be planned for and talked about. Parts of the explanatory text which will appear on the screen, may be presented in reading before the actual showing of the film. In this connection, the writer worked with a teacher of science who was presenting several reels of films on volcanoes. Through their ability to read the English subtitles, the pupils could better understand what they were seeing.

Excursions, preparatory to the reading of English material pertaining to any particular subject, will clarify the reading experience. An example is furnished by a trip to a coffee plantation. The experience is new to the teacher; therefore, an exchange of explanation occurs. The children and the teacher return to the classroom and reproduce their experience in conversation and printed form. They may supplement it with their own pictures. Printed material relating to the growing of coffee is used to supplement their knowledge of how it is grown, cared for, and disposed of. If there is a scarcity of such material, small reading groups may socialize its use by reading aloud and discussing. A general class discussion may sum up the findings. An account of

# The Letter-Sounds: A Reading Problem

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THAT ENGLISH and American spelling are sadly in need of revision is too well known to require mention. A good statement of the case for revision is that of Siler<sup>1</sup>.

One reason why poor readers are found in alarming numbers in the English-speaking countries is probably orthography. Another reason that might bear investigation is the difficulty of associating the sounds of certain letters with their names.

A widely used diagnostic reading test, that of Gates<sup>2</sup>, includes a test (Test IX-9) aiming specifically to measure the ability to sound the letters in isolation. Superficially this would seem to be one of the easiest tests in the battery. Actually, in contrast to relatively inconsistent performances on other parts of the test, reported elsewhere<sup>3</sup>, cases examined by the writer consistently performed poorly in the test, as measured by the Gates norms.

This test is not to be confused with the succeeding tests, which measure ability to name the letters. The purpose of test IX-9 is to discover the child's knowledge of the sounds only, as the hissing sound for s, etc. Correctly naming the letter would result in a plus score for the vowels but in a minus score for the consonants, i.e. b is pronounced "buh" not *bee*, f is pronounced "fuh" and not *eff*. The vowels, on the other hand are sounded by name, with the exception of "y."

<sup>1</sup> Siler, H.—"Shall We Streamline Our English?" *Clearing House*, 1937, 12, 152-156.

<sup>2</sup> Gates, A. I.—*Gates Reading Diagnosis Tests*, Bureau of Publications, Teachers College, Columbia University, 1933.

<sup>3</sup> Lichtenstein, A.—"An Investigation of Reading Retardation," *J. Genetic Psychol.*, 1938, 52: 407-423.

The norms<sup>4</sup> for these tests begin with nine correct responses out of twenty-six. This is equivalent to a grade level of 1.5. The means move up then to a total of 26 correct responses which is the norm for grade level 3.9. In other words, it is not until a child is practically in the fourth grade that he may be expected to give all the letter sounds correctly.

This contrasts noticeably with the norms for Tests IX-10B, Naming Capital Letters; and IX-11B, Naming Lower Case Letters. At grade level 1.5 the average child can name correctly 13 capital letters and 14 lower case letters. At grade level 2.0 the expectancy is 24 capital letters and the same number of lower case letters. In the test of letter sounds the norm for this grade level is 20. At grade level 2.3 the average child names all capital letters correctly, and at 2.6 he names all the lower case letters correctly. The norms for these grade levels in letter sounds are 21 and 22, respectively.

As a matter of fact there are some strong indications that the norms for the Letter Sounds tests as compiled by Gates are even higher than they seem to run in the population sampled by the present writer. That is, the cases examined seem, with considerable consistency, to achieve lower grade levels on this particular item than they average on the other elements of the Gates Test. This may possibly be due to the fact that Gates does not recommend the use of this test except with

<sup>4</sup> Gates, A. I.—*Improvement of Reading* (revised) N. Y., Macmillan Co. 1935, Pp. 616.

cases who do very poorly on the Blending Test (IX-8). The writer gave it to all his cases, regardless of score in Blending. As a result, a less restricted sampling may have been observed. However, one would not expect children who blended poorly to do well in letter naming. On the other hand, Gates' norms may be based on a normal population while all of the cases tested by the writer were referred for reading difficulties.

The difference in difficulty between the tests is clearly apparent. The question arises, "Why?" Why is it so much more difficult for children to give the sound of an isolated letter than to give the name of the same letter? It would seem that not only in phonetic drills but in spelling work, in writing of any kind, and even in actual reading, there is a great deal more opportunity for children to use the letter's sound than to use its name. There is little learning<sup>5</sup> of the alphabet in present day schools, or that might account of it. Are the names easier to remember, perhaps?

Examination of names and sounds should serve to prove that the sounds are at least as easy to recall as the names. One element, however, appears to be largely responsible for the additional difficulty of the sounds. Ten consonants' names begin with the sound of the letter, as *b-bee*, sound "buh," or *J-jay*, sound "juh"<sup>6</sup>. These letters, b, and j, and others whose names begin with their own sounds are the least troublesome on the test. The most troublesome are f, h, l, m, n, q, r, s, w, x, and y.<sup>7</sup> These are sounded most frequently by reading difficulty cases as follows:

<sup>5</sup> None in the schools where the writer tested.

<sup>6</sup> This apparent vocalization is presented only for clarity; actually it is understood that the less "uh" attached to the j-sound the better, but there is no way of indicating the simple consonant-sound in print except phonetically.

<sup>7</sup> Y is considered a consonant hereafter, as it is in this role that it causes trouble.

Letter	Sounded	Probable Basis
f	eh	Beginning of letter's name (ef)
h	ā	Do— <i>aitch</i>
l	eh	Do
m	eh	Do
n	eh	Do
q	cue	The entire name of the letter; sound is complex
r	ā	Beginning of letter's name
s	eh	Do
w	d	Do—double—u
x	eh	Do
y	w	Do

Here we have what appears to be the chief source of the difficulty in sounding the letters. The youngsters apparently generalize the rule, which applies to ten consonants, and approximately to the vowels, and use it in sounding the exceptional consonants, which happen to be in the majority!

Some additional evidence for this assumption may be found in Gates' Table 25<sup>8</sup>—The norms for test X-2—Giving Letters for Sounds. This is the exact reverse of Test IX-9, that is the examiner makes a sound and the subject gives the letter that makes it. There are 31 sounds, due to the fact that several vowels have more than one sound, and also due to the inclusion of the phonograms *th*, *ch*, and *sh*. This should serve to make the test as a whole more difficult, but the table tells another story. The grade level for a score of 31 (perfect) is 3.5. Thus a child at middle of third grade can respond correctly to all the letter-sounds (and several extra ones) by naming the letter, whereas it will be recalled, he was not expected to give the sounds correctly for all the letters until at grade level 3.9.

This phenomenon requires more investigation. Comparison with the results of the Durrell test<sup>9</sup> which also includes a measure of letter-sounding and one of letter-naming would be worth while. No norms on these are included in the manual, as the test was apparently included principally for individual diagnosis.

<sup>8</sup> *Improvement of Reading*, p. 619.

<sup>9</sup> Durrell, D.—*Analysis of Reading Difficulty*, Yonkers, World Book Co., 1937.



# Enjoying Compositions

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NOTE: The following paper was written as a reply to the opening paragraph of an article by Harriet J. Smith, "Letter-Writing as Composition" which appeared in *The Elementary English Review* for March, 1938. The writer below expresses views in direct opposition to those of Miss Smith.

**T**HERE IS NOTHING in the field of elementary English more pleasant to teach and more satisfying in results than written composition. Such a statement will, no doubt, call forth cries of disagreement from many English teachers who speak of composition in abject and despairing tones. But some of us do believe that the teaching of composition can be enjoyed.

First of all, the field of composition subjects is broad and fertile. Here, for instance, are some titles selected at random from a collection of papers written by my sixth grade class during the term:

The Charging Elephant  
Pandora's Curiosity  
The Buffalo Hunt  
A Forward Pass  
The Last of the Litter  
In a Bad Fix  
Told by a Fish  
How to Make a Kite  
A Dreadful Dream  
Munchausen, the Second  
A Visit with Santa  
Earning My First Dollar  
A Joke on Me  
Lost in the Jungle  
My Blood Ran Cold  
My Magic Carpet  
A Day on Skates  
Morning in a Lumber Camp  
An Eighteenth Century Christmas Scene  
A Secret Swim

These titles are varied and interesting, and appeal to the imagination of the reader, but their chief value lies in the

fact that imagination is given full play in the mind of the writer. And this combination of interest and imagination is the one upon which hangs the key to the teaching of written composition.

Interest must be present, if results are to be achieved; and that same interest can only be arrived at by keeping the subject of the composition at the child's level of interest. For instance, during a study of the coal industry, our compositions are *not* written from the following viewpoints:

How Coal is Mined  
The History of Mining

but rather from these, or similar ones:

A Story by a Mining Mule  
Down into the Deep Mine  
Dangerous Thrills in Mining  
What Two Quakers Found  
Black Diamonds

Then, in the study of the Colonies, we use ideas like these:

Long Shaft, the Arrow  
My Life as a Knife-Sheath  
A Log from a Fort  
Miles Standish's Sword  
The Last Handful of Meal  
The Autobiography of a Wooden Leg  
The Story of the Sampler  
The Tale of a Trencher.

Ideas and titles of this type are contributed by the boys after a rousing and informative discussion of the day's subject, the titles being listed on the board to suggest others. Some titles are written by those who prefer to keep their "brain-children" to themselves until the time for reading the composition aloud.

Other suggestions are got from a wide use of pictures, from sports, from holidays and seasons, and from integration

of social studies, science, nature study, and art. Personal experiences are written about as well as those of purely imaginary origin.

We have certain aims in writing our compositions. These we review before each new bit of writing. They are:

- Originality of idea
- Opening sentences which will interest the reader
- Complete sentences
- Each paragraph about one idea
- Correct spelling
- Use of vivid (living) words and groups of words
- Correct use of capitals and punctuation marks
- Strong ending sentence.

I have found there are definite steps necessary to our writing and these same stages have so completely won over my classes of boys to a real desire to write that our day is too short and I find them asking eagerly, "Can't we finish them?" "Will we have more time?" "Please let me read mine," and others just as enthusiastic.

These are the steps followed:

- Class discussion of our subject
- Construction of a simple outline of main topics (sometimes as a class—other times as individuals)
- Listing title suggestions on the board
- Listing vivid words that may be used in the composition (these further suggest ideas).
- Copying outline and vocabulary in notebooks for future use
- Writing the composition, the boys using a title from the board or creating an original one
- "Proof-reading" their own papers for errors in spelling, punctuation, capitals, sentence structure, word usage, and ideas.

After the completion of these steps, which usually takes two periods or more, a short conference is held with each boy, sometimes privately and sometimes for the benefit of the class. At that time the errors which have been checked on his paper are mentioned. (A lesson of this

type often develops into an indirect grammar lesson, of which some common error is the subject. The need arises and we have a reason for teaching what might be but formal grammar under other circumstances). Or sometimes, I simply place checks above errors or omissions and, without mentioning the error to the boys, return their papers for further correction.

It is surprising how quickly they can find mistakes, once they have the notion that it is a part of their job to "search" their papers. They no longer feel that sense of futility which comes from seeing their papers battle-scarred, with the teacher's corrections so completely "black-ing out" their efforts. Think back! Do you remember some English papers returned in such condition?

This "proof-reading" has a special value for my class, as, during the next term, these boys have training in elementary printing and in the print shop, and publish a book of their own writings.

The following are compositions written by my sixth grade boys:

#### PEEP! PEEP!

When spring comes, so do the birds. They are busy all the time building a nest and trying to make it comfortable. Soon the eggs will hatch and then the little birds will keep the mother busy feeding them. Sometimes the birds eat more food than their own weight.

When a baby bird is ready to take its flying lesson, it learns to get at the edge of the nest and flap its wings. It hops about the nest and chirps. A day soon comes when it gets on the edge of the nest and leaps into the air. It goes a little way with its mother and then returns to the nest. It is no longer a baby bird.

—Frank Salvo

#### AN OLD INDIAN HAIR-CUTTER

I am Samoset's scalping knife. I was made from a flint stone and a wooden handle. Samoset wore his enemies' scalps around his belt. He carried me in a squirrel-skin sheath and always sharpened me when I was dull.

Samoset carried me with him when he met the first colonists on a spring day. He carried me when he showed the colonists how to plant Indian corn, and other vegetables. I am a very valuable knife now because of my age and the fame of my old owner. Now I lie in a glass case in a great museum.

—Blair Thompson



## A TRIP TO THE MOON

We have planned for a trip to the moon. The year is 1995. Rocket ships have been invented, and I have a ship of my own, going at the speed of three miles per second. The body has the shape of a bullet fifty feet long and a wing-spread of forty feet. We have to have gas masks, for there is no air on the moon.

We soon get ready. There are five of us: William, John, Caesar, Thomas, and I. We get in and tightly bolt the door. We are off for the moon!

When we arrive, we put on our masks and get out. We are surprised at the terrific speed at which we move.

We decide among us to play a game of ball. Caesar is pitcher, I am up to bat, William is catcher, John is first base, and Thomas is a fielder. Caesar pitches the ball, and I hit it. It goes for a part of a mile. Thomas soon gets it. He throws it to William. As he advanced to tag me, I jump over him like a kangaroo and I land on base for a home run! At this point I awaken. I've had a dream.

—Harry W. Adams

## A CHILD'S SENSE OF HUMOR

(Continued from page 17)

as you want to look at the pictures only once.

11. Funnies have the same story over and over again.

Strange as these findings may seem to the adult, they do prove that most children enjoy reading books and will resort to the comics only when no suitable books are available. It is the duty of the school to encourage this love of humor in the child so that as he grows it will not develop into the mean and sordid type found in so many adults.

By placing before the child a wealth of humorous literature his desire for something funny will be satisfied and he will be less likely to seek his chance to laugh in the comics and in the misfortunes of others.

We, as teachers, may not be able to develop a keen sense of humor in all children, but we can endeavor to de-

velop in them the ability to appreciate the really humorous situations. We can accomplish much in our efforts to make the child happy by supplying him with an abundance of literature filled with incidents which the child will find humorous.

If, as the pessimists believe, there will be less and less to laugh at as the children grow older, it is even more desirable that their sense of humor be continually developed in order that they get their laughs in now.

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## THE LETTER-SOUNDS

(Continued from page 24)

What is the solution to this difficulty? We might change the name of the troublesome letters and begin calling f "fuh," and w "wuh," but there would probably be much more objection to such a procedure than to the changes in spelling that have long been vainly urged.

A safer suggestion would be for teachers to be aware of this difficulty and to keep it from occurring in the early grades where habits are formed. A few minutes drill every day on letter sounds should be sufficient antitoxin for the vast majority of normal children.

# Vocabulary Problems in the Elementary School

## A Digest of Current Research

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(Continued from December)

A number of investigations dealt with certain aspects of vocabulary in certain texts.

Schweider (190) states that while contemporary beginning books in reading (1922) do not agree as to the vocabulary to introduce there is more agreement now than was previously the case. There seems to be at least some beginning toward establishing a basic primary reading vocabulary. Recent readers introduce fewer words used only once than do older readers, but to provide sufficient repetition supplementary books are necessary. The author recommends work books.

Wilson (253) points out the importance of considering phrases and context and not simply words alone in determining whether the vocabulary of one primer is approached or reviewed by that of another.

Wozencraft (259), examining the primer and first grade readers used in Texas, states that over 2800 different concepts are needed by the first grade child if he is to understand what he reads. Wozencraft says that 258 of the 1734 different words having different concepts she found in this investigation occurred only once, only 79 of the total words were common to all of the books. However, only 100 of the words were in neither the Thorndike nor the Gates list.

Lammel (125), studying the number of intermediate grade books, points out

the importance of science terms and states that the manner in which the words were introduced led more frequently to a general and limited understanding rather than to understanding that should be expected from intermediate grade children.

Kerr (120) points out the difficulty of certain geography concepts, saying that the most difficult had to do with the relationship between some aspect of climate and the earth-sun's position; the second most difficult between human activity and nature elements; the least difficult between nature elements. Kerr finds a lack of sufficient visual material.

Bedwell (14) studied the concepts of quantity in third grade social reading material. He found that children might have a factual knowledge of a term but not a functional concept. He states that 100% of the class knew that "seven days make a week" but only 52 knew the application of the term "week." Many definite quantitative terms used frequently were misunderstood widely.

Ernest Horn (102) stated that many problems of misunderstanding arise from the technical vocabulary of the social studies—inadequate imagery, faulty interpretation, and the like.

Kueneman (124) found that simplifying fourth grade geographic material by substituting words used by kindergarten children was effective in building up speed of reading, but that there was little beneficial effect upon understanding. Foster (74) and Clarke (37), using pri-

\*Seventh Annual Research Bulletin of the National Conference on Research in English.

mary grade historical materials, came to similar conclusions. Nolte (158), using words from Thorndike's first 2500 and Ogden's Basic English, simplified materials read by intermediate grade children, and found little difference between the difficulty of the simplified versions and that of the original passages.

Horn (102) points out that frequently attempts to simplify by using more usual words bring about complicating factors, such as involved or less precise substitute expressions. If the reader has insufficient background, if concepts are not carefully developed, the simple process of using more common words is not going to bring about understanding. Better, after having reduced complicating factors to a reasonable minimum, stress adequate understanding. Exact meaning is always the important thing.

Stolte (214) and Dewey (50) are quoted by Horn as stating that besides intelligence, interest, reading ability, background, accurate knowledge were likely underestimated factors in proper understanding of terms read.

Adelaide Ayer (5) demonstrated clearly the part unreasonable vocabulary load played in piling up difficulties in elementary school history, and Kepner (119) showed that on higher levels, much of the vocabulary load was caused by words not essentially involved. Ayer also described many needless difficulties.

Wesley (244) insists that "history" lists, and by implication other subject lists, must be taken rather sceptically. He claims that very few words are specifically history words, because they are used elsewhere also.

In the *Second Yearbook* of the National Council for Social Studies Barr (9) reports a study of the vocabulary of history which indicates that children in large numbers did not understand what they

read and consequently did not remember what they were supposed to have learned. This study is reported further by A. S. Barr and C. W. Gifford (10).

Clarke (37) attempted to simplify social science materials in the second grade by substituting, for technical terms, other terms in the child's normal spoken vocabulary. She found little or no advantage from this procedure since ideas had to be developed by concrete experience rather than through words alone.

Hunt (107) states that third grade arithmetic which he analyzed presented a great many technical words, a great many non-technical words which did not appear in third grade readers, and insufficient repetition and explanation for both.

Tillie (231) in a later similar study of textbooks used in the 3-B grade of a New York school found that about 40% of the words in the arithmetic, English, reading, and spelling textbooks were difficult, and that from 30% to 40% of these difficult words were not in the first 3000 of Thorndike's list. This indicates a considerable vocabulary load for the grade.

Farquhar (65) says that especially the supplementary reading books in history, geography, and general literature which she studied present a very large range of words as well as a number of complex sentences. Farquhar studied fifth grade books. She reported that a great many of the words in history and geography were not found in the readers and recommends definite specific teaching of history and geography materials.

Rankin (183) states that his analysis of four recently published arithmetics designed for third and fourth grades includes many words not found in Horn's list, "326 arithmetic words," 24% of which were found only in one text. Carson (32) stated that recent arithmetics tend to introduce more reading material

and more words than did previously published texts, indicating a tendency toward amplification of ideas.

Hebel (94) found 1345 different so-called arithmetical words in four fifth grade arithmetic texts, 256 above fifth grade level.

Johnson O'Connor (161) in a number of contributions, has reported relationship between business success, administrative ability, and extent of vocabulary. His studies indicate that extent of vocabulary is almost inevitably associated with superior intelligence and superior administrative ability. However, it has not been demonstrated that cause and effect relationship exists between the two factors mentioned and vocabulary, nor has it been demonstrated that increasing vocabulary increases administrative ability. In the *English Vocabulary Builder* O'Connor insists that there are three laws of learning vocabulary: (a) the dictionary's words can be grouped according to a universal order of progressive unfamiliarity, (b) in this grouping there is a dividing line of difficulty for each individual, who knows most of the words below it, very few above it, (c) an individual learns most easily those words just beyond the boundary of his vocabulary.

#### IV. DEVELOPMENT

A most fruitful field for subsequent research is consideration of how one can best develop the vocabularies of children. The group of studies immediately following has to do with certain of the many aspects of this problem. One cannot say that research workers have neglected the problem entirely. Yet, with the exception of relatively few studies, little of concrete value has been presented. True, there are suggestive contributions in addition to those which are concrete and to the point, but much remains to be done before the following questions proposed by

Dora Smith<sup>3</sup> can be answered.

What is the relationship of growth in language power to the child's background of experience? If words are truly to become symbols of meaning, what is the best approach to the deepening and extending of meaning for the individual child? Is it wider experience, is it increased reading on varied subjects of interest, is it more life and activity in the classroom, or is it more drills upon set language forms? How far should such enrichment of experience be substituted for exercises in vocabulary building? On the other hand, to what extent are such exercises necessary to the refinement of concepts and the development of exactness in shades of meaning? Research in reading has made revolutionary changes in our theories concerning how concepts develop and how words become meaningful to the child. Shall we not challenge research to make parallel studies of how power in expression grows? In what soil? In what atmosphere? With what kind of nurture?

Some of the studies in this group are negative rather than affirmative in their results.

White (249) pointed out the failure of word counts, as he examined them, to consider semantic variations. Dale (47), in a significant article commenting upon Thorndike's word list, attacks the claim that the frequency index of a word is valid evidence of its familiarity to a child. What is needed, he says,

is a statement as to the mean percentage of the children in the various grades who will know the words in the divisions. Some data of this type are already available. Four samplings of 100 words each were made from the Thorndike list, tests constructed on them and the data . . . on the percentages of children knowing each successive thousand were secured.

He refers to an article by Thorndike and Symonds (229) which throws a little light upon this subject. Dale also points out the importance of knowing the variability of the words known in a specified area of the Thorndike list and reports a study attacking this problem. The presence of many homographs complicates the use of the Thorndike list "and the disparity between the frequency of the root word and a derivative from that root." After the first thousand words have been considered, the law of diminishing returns operates sharply, Dale shows:

<sup>3</sup> In a recent address.



One of the most serious deficiencies of the Thorndike list is its assumption that a measure of the importance of a technical term in general reading can be secured by adding together the frequency scores of words as discovered in a variety of different sources . . . This technical language appears only in the life of a particular subject and is essentially different

as different subjects are discussed. Dale suggests a separate list of technical words. He makes it clear that he is not leveling an attack against Thorndike's work, but is pointing out its true nature.

Seegers (192) presented meager but suggestive evidence to the effect that position in the Thorndike list does not inevitably indicate the ability of a child to understand a given word. Thorndike and Lorge (134) are now engaging in a very considerable study providing a count based upon semantic variations. There is considerable investigation of the spoken vocabulary of children in school, but a dearth of such study conducted outside school. Some words of high frequency on children's lists take quite different positions in adult lists.

McKee (144) reiterates the impossibility of determining which child will understand given words through the place those words hold in the Thorndike list. He shows that words often used by children are high in the Thorndike list placement.

To illustrate: If we assume that sentences containing several words of lower frequency rating than those among the first 5000 of the Thorndike list are too "hard" for fourth grade children, the following sentences, deliberately but easily made by using some words of low frequency rating in the Thorndike list, but which are used frequently by fourth grade children in writing letters outside the school, would be eliminated from a selection for such children.

1. Tonight we will make a bonfire and have roasted marshmallows and wieners.
2. Charley poked the little sneak hard enough to give him a nosebleed and a toothache.

In the first of the above sentences, two of the words are in the twelfth, and the twentieth thousand respectively. One of the words is not among the full 20,000. In the second sentence, three words are in the eighth and twelfth thousand respectively. One of the words does not appear in the list.

J. C. Dewey (50) says:

It will be impossible to measure carefully the vocabulary difficulty of reading material until there is

available a list of words together with their different meanings which children understand at different grade levels. Fortunately, a beginning has been made on this problem, although as yet nothing is available in printed form.

Rinsland (186) speaks of the many logical discrepancies found between words children write and adult lists. For example, one list includes the adjective *Dutch*, but *American*, *English*, and *French* are not included; the word *sea* is in the 500 most frequently used words according to one list, *ocean* is not.

Rinsland agrees with Foran that Horn overweights business correspondence, and believes that no list prior to his own is based upon extensive enough analysis to determine in what grade words are likely to be used by children. He agrees with Horn that all forms of a word should be tabulated.

It should be remembered that while Rinsland's list is a distinct contribution any list has certain limitations. If a list be derived entirely from letters it reflects only spontaneous usage; if from school writing alone it likely reflects insufficient spontaneity. In other words no list can be absolute, can be entirely complete, can claim to have exhausted all possibilities. Given the proper stimulus and the proper background conceivably a given child might use almost any word.

Zipf (262) makes a clear distinction between what he calls "lexical units" and words, pointing out that "the word *child* may be considered as one word, *children* as another." A much more pertinent example might be afforded if even more irregularly formed plurals were considered, or if highly irregular verbs were thought of. For example, if five dozen typical college graduates were asked to name the present indicative of the verb *wrought* it is doubtful if a half dozen correct answers would be given. This is an extreme example of inflectional variation. Strictly speaking, *wrought* and

*work* are the same word, but what child would so consider them? This whole matter needs more research than has been given it.

Certain studies throw at least a little light on the ability of children to supply shades of meaning.

Steger (213) with 464 elementary school pupils from grades five to eight in four communities studied the ability of these children to supply all possible meanings attached to 44 words of high frequency selected from Horn's list. Intelligence was tested by means of the Kuhlman-Anderson Intelligence Test. Word knowledge was tested by means of homemade tests. For each word pupils were asked to write as many different meanings as they could in the form of words, phrases, or sentences. It was found that there was some increase in ability to detect or state shades of meaning from grade to grade. There was enormous individual variation and a great deal of lack of intimate word knowledge indicated. Steger reports low positive correlation between knowledge of shades of word meaning and I. Q. and mental age.

White (249) studied the semantic variations in the oral and written vocabularies of 79 fourth, fifth, and sixth grade pupils in the University of Iowa public schools. The children were shown films and then were asked to write and speak about what they had seen, the oral composition being recorded on the Ediphone. The pupils' compositions were analyzed to determine different meanings, according to context, children expressed by certain words. Even with this small number of children and with the limited stimuli, the importance of semantic variations is strongly apparent. For example, White discovered that the word *up* was used with 18 different interpretations

in the oral compositions, 17 in the written, 22 different meanings in all. The words *up, out, take, took, get, back, down, over, write, all, away*, are examples of words used in many different senses. The importance of these findings as they can be applied to present vocabulary lists and texts is manifest.

Williams (251) in a study of 62 first grade Mississippi children used 32 frequently used words which have many shades of meaning in English. Dividing the children into two groups she asked each group to make sentences with each of the words, then over a period of three months gave one group considerable help in such activity. According to the measures employed, the experimental group made twice the progress of the control group in the skill described.

Dolch (57) has described four types of words which present difficulty to children with respect to meaning as follows:

One group of words describes familiar enough ideas but are poetic or literary equivalents for other words which the children use instead; such as *abhor, bestow, bewilder, cease* . . .

A very clearly marked-off group signifying things or actions which few children anywhere have occasion to come in contact with; these include *ambassador, batten, attorney*, and the like. They are words from adult books, adult occupations, and general adult affairs that do not affect the home or form part of the physical environment . . .

A third group of words which may be familiar to children of some localities, but which are distant from the experience of most children in this country; examples are *arroyo, bayberry, amidstships, antlers, brae*, etc. . . .

The fourth and probably the most difficult group of words act as symbols for abstractions or generalizations; some of these are: *cajoleries, aspiring, circumstances, advantage*. These words are hard simply because few minds, child or adult, find it easy to work over past experience and discover or use the underlying relationships which we refer to as abstractions and generalizations.

Thorndike (223) approaches the same problem classifying words thus:

(a) words which always or almost always have the same meaning; (b) those which have several clearly distinct meanings, the one intended being indicated, as a rule, by the context; (c) those whose meanings fluctuate "by fine shades or degrees" and which require not only a study of the context but also "considerable ability and experience in the hearer or

reader"; (d) those whose meanings are so varied that they can be grasped only as totals, such as *no matter, never mind, call down, clear out.*

Thorndike says that when given words are taught pupils the teacher must consider the problem of how semantic variations limit the teaching to specific connotations. Therefore it is frequently desirable at first encounter to learn or teach a word partially rather than completely. Recognizing the limitation of this procedure and planning for supplementary subsequent endeavor, in a previous study (227) quoted by Gray, (89) Thorndike said, concerning the meanings recalled or invoked by words:

Each word (sometimes a part of a word) tends to call up those responses which are bound to it by the pupils' past experience working under the conditions of the present mental set. Of these responses some may be discarded from thought as soon as they appear. The one that is left as the determiner of meaning may be "right" or "wrong" or one that contributes zero meaning (such as the mere approximate sound of the word *paragraph* or *effect* or *condition* to a child who has never heard those words used). For the meaning attached to the word to be right means to be right for the purpose of understanding the paragraph—to be adapted to the meanings of the other words. Tendencies for words to call up universally wrong meanings or meanings right in other connections but wrong here have to be suppressed. These contributory elements of meanings have to be felt in the right relations.

In this same connection Dolch (57) speaks of the following types of words: (a) those whose meanings are already known and need merely to be recognized; (b) those which can be taught through the use of familiar experiences; and (c) those which can be taught satisfactorily only through the provision of additional first-hand experiences. The procedure in these cases is obviously quite different. Most of the types of words which cause difficulty belong to the third group.

McKee (144, 145) points out that in developing vocabulary we should pay attention to the words found most valuable in writing and in reading, and states that "emphasis should be placed upon a variety of connectives, adjectives, adverbs, and combinations of words."

Stadtlander (211) and Laughlin (126) give us some idea of what words are normally used by elementary school children.

Escher (64) points out that in first grade reading particularly not only words but phrases be given consideration, stating that groups of words that are in phrases should be treated as such, pointing out that little repetition is provided for phrases and there is little agreement as to the number of phrases that should be presented.

Wilson (253) came to practically identical findings in a similar study.

Related to these are such studies as Mildred Kiefer's (121) account of the letters of thanks dictated by first grade children in the University of Iowa Elementary School. Miss Kiefer has not only assembled a valuable collection of oral compositions, but has provided a means of estimating growth in language. She recorded the reaction of children to a language situation at the beginning of a school year and made a second record of the same children at the end of the year. She found dictation exercises fruitful stimuli, stimulating growth in vocabulary as well as in other directions.

Fitzgerald (69) shows that children do not ordinarily write letters of greetings, congratulation, sympathy, condolence, and the like. Probably if children were stimulated to write such letters they themselves would grow in vocabulary and investigators and teachers would learn that in still another area we have been ignorant concerning the words children know.

Williams (251) found that when first grade children were asked to make sentences with certain words, an increase in knowledge of shades of word meaning resulted.

A number of researches have demon-



strated the discrepancies which exist between children's vocabularies at stated levels and the demands made by books designed for specific grades.

Thorndike (222) showed that books designed for a single grade were quite different in vocabulary load. The range of vocabulary demanded by such a situation is tremendous, probably far beyond the abilities of any but the most highly superior children. Thorndike recommends that for each of the intermediate grades, lists should be provided for direct vocabulary instruction. He recommends word analysis, word derivation exercises, word groups. Especially should such lists consider words met, but not met frequently. In a subsequent study Thorndike (226) counted between four and five million words in 120 books recommended by Terman and Lima for grades three to eight. The vocabulary load discovered by Thorndike was exceedingly great. His 20,000 list by no means included all of the words used.

It is interesting to note, as Holmes (100) pointed out, that inefficient readers were unable to state which words they did not know. Such readers do not gather meanings in context. These same situations apply to a less degree to more efficient readers. In both instances the desirability of direct vocabulary instruction is indicated. Similarly, Durrell<sup>4</sup> reports a study by Miss Jeannette Elivian showing that in general, fifth and sixth grade children were unable to discover for themselves the words which they did not know, even though words were defined in context. These children acquired very few word meanings through a single reading. They varied in their ability to secure meaning from context when they faced a word-definition matching test to be taken while reading. Certain of the

skills involved seemed to be developed if six or eight specific lessons were given over to such development.

Young (261) pointed out that in intermediate grade reading, incomplete or insufficient understanding of word meanings rather than inability to read the word causes most of the trouble.

Bear (11) discovered that the length of words is a definite factor in the difficulty of a reading text. The percentage of monosyllabic words is a convenient measure of difficulty.

In a thorough analysis of the reading difficulties of children in remedial reading classes conducted at Temple University in the summer of 1938 under the direction of Miss Edith Sherman, it was found that many children referred to this class as reading problem cases could recognize words, could read glibly, were not at all lacking in intelligence, yet read with complete ignorance of the thought of the passages encountered. Careful corrective measures emphasizing thought rather than word calling resulted in tremendous gains in reading test results over a period of five weeks. Similar results were obtained during the preceding summer by Miss Romalda Bishop. Of course, these results are not unique in this class. The work of Donald Durrell, Emmett Betts, Marion Monroe, and the studies of Ethel Mabie in connection with the elementary school language program in Madison, Wisconsin, are just a few of the examples of similar findings which shriek to high heaven the necessity of emphasizing meaning, even though the sanctified concept of speed may suffer presumable violence.

A number of specific methods have been suggested by different investigators. Swanson (220) testing 200 students from eighth, tenth, and twelfth grade sections using numbers 95 and 176 of the Johnson O'Conner samples found vo-

<sup>4</sup> Letter to the writer.



cabulary to be related to intelligence, achievement and general ability. The highest correlation was between vocabulary and intelligence but Swanson states that the interest factor is quite important in vocabulary growth and recommends vocabulary drill. Lawshe (127), came to similar conclusions.

From the Wilmington, Delaware Public Schools Dr. Zenas R. Clark,<sup>5</sup> Director of Research, reports studies indicating that children were greatly handicapped in the reading because they could not associate the meaning of the word with the printed word they read. He reports that "plain old-fashioned vocabulary drill" was effective.

Newburn (157) reports that drill on isolated words apart from content did not seem to produce understanding, and Rosenquist (187) found that simple drill on the vocabulary difficulties encountered in fourth and fifth grade social studies textbooks did not result in any great improvement. Rosenquist states that word recognition is not essentially a problem, but that comprehension is a considerable problem.

Bush (28) studied the effect of practice on the speed of free association with 32 fourth grade children using a list of 600 words taken from readers and spellers for grades two to five, and 100 additional words commonly used. The children were paired on the basis of age, sex, and I. Q. One group received no practice, while the experimental group, over a period of three and one-half months, had practice in responding to 31 lists of 15 words each. The results indicated that maturation was a much more significant factor than practice in developing speed of responses.

Sexton and Harron (196) found that children in the upper primary grades and

the more capable first graders profited more from phonetic analysis than most average children. Durrell and Sullivan (63) say:

Possibly the greatest value of instruction in visual and auditory discrimination and in any comparison of world elements at any level is to be found in the increased rate of learning of new words rather than in increased power of solving words independently. A child who has had his attention called to certain roots or prefixes and who later notices these elements in a new word will probably recognize the word at sight more readily than if he had had no such training. It would be desirable to verify this assumption of increased learning rate through experimental techniques.

Galter (78), in a study designed to determine the relative merits of story reproduction and original oral composition in developing oral English and particularly vocabulary, using the Thorndike test of word knowledge before and after a four month teaching period, found slight but consistent difference in favor of the original expression method. He noted greater improvement in grades four, five, and six than in grades seven and eight.

Reilly (184) pointed out that a study of the effect of "certain forces within and outside the school on a child's vocabulary" showed definitely the great importance of natural experiences and the school's over-emphasis upon bookish experiences. This finding is quite similar to Galter's statement and is further substantiated in Brown's (23) investigation of the oral expression of certain fourth grades. Professor Worth J. Osburn (164) reports an interesting and significant series of studies now in progress at the University of Washington. Osburn states that inordinate stress upon rapid reading has resulted in superficiality and reading without thinking. All of this, Osburn says, "leads at once to the question of vocabulary." As do others, he speaks of the numerous occasions in which children read or use words for which they have no adequate concepts and calls attention to the unique meanings many words present in certain

<sup>5</sup> Letter to writer.

frames of reference. For example, (the illustration is the writer's and not Osburn's) *bridge* means one thing to an engineer, another to a dentist. He finds the Buckingham and Dolch *Combined Word List* very useful in estimating the words a child may be expected to know or learn in a given grade, but again points out that such children cannot be expected to know every meaning of such words. He quotes with appreciation the study of Woodworth and Wells (257) and recommends their statement of the importance of word relationships. In these studies Osburn and his students classified kindergarten words into categories. Then pupils at various grade levels were asked to select categories in which they were interested and write as many more words as they could think of in the several categories. In teaching vocabulary, pupils were asked to cross out an unrelated word found in a group of otherwise related words. Similar experiments with pictures are planned for non-readers. By means of such training progress seems to have been effected and it is interesting to note that scores on group intelligence tests were raised, indicating the importance of the verbal factor in intelligence tests. Osburn, in his suggestions concerning vocabulary building, recommends attention to roots, prefixes, suffixes, word formation. As yet he has no exact evidence concerning the value of this approach.

Goldenberg (87), in his study of word elements and their effect upon pupils' knowledge and meaning of words, found it wise for teachers to make use of prefixes, suffixes, and stems in teaching vocabulary. This was in grade six.

O'Shea (165) carried on a study among pupils in grades five to eight inclusive to determine the effect of interest

on the development of meaning vocabulary. She found that children's knowledge of vocabulary was "highest on words typical of the books which they liked best, was next on books neutral in interest, and was lowest on words to be found in books interesting to the opposite sex." The raw scores made on tests based on the vocabulary of the books read showed that "(a) in some cases the children who liked a book best gained most; (b) in other cases there was no difference in learning among the groups that liked the books differently; and (c) in still other cases the group that liked the book least gained most in vocabulary." When the factor of intelligence was held constant, "the children who had only a mild interest in the book gained from it an understanding of more new words than either the children who liked it very much or those who liked it very little." Of several books read, a child seemed "to gain least in vocabulary on the one he liked best, next on the one which he rated neutral, and most on the one he liked least." These findings justify the conclusion that vocabulary is greatest in fields of interest, but that it increases most rapidly in fields to which one has not yet given specific attention.

Liddell (131) studied the efficiency of using: (a) context method, (b) telling method, (c) picture method, (d) isolated form method, or (e) dictionary procedure, among 236 pupils of varying intelligence in fourth, fifth, and sixth grades in mixed neighborhoods. A list of one hundred words was obtained from eight fourth grade readers in order to test the pupils. The 20 words most frequently missed were used in the experiment. The children were divided into groups and a different method was used with each. Each group was tested before and after a teaching period. At the end the groups were compared to see which children

profited most. It was found that the telling method was the most effective in teaching word meanings. Following next in order were the context, picture, and dictionary methods.

The context method of teaching word meanings ranks very close to the talking method in effectiveness. According to this experiment there is but a slight difference between the two.

Most significant is the fact that the dictionary method, which is such a commonly used method in our schools today, here ranked as the least effective of the four methods used. Obviously either our dictionaries or our methods of teaching the use of the dictionary is at fault.

The children having I.Q.'s of more than 120 made the most gain when taught by the telling method. The context method was the best for children having I.Q. of less than 85. Following this in order of importance were the picture, dictionary, and telling methods.

Rossi (188) points out the importance of context in the development of meaning. Of course this is not new. Hollingworth<sup>6</sup>, Stone (215), Gates (83), and many others have pointed this out frequently in connection with reading and spelling in many studies.

Williams (251) found that pupils of the first grade, given specific drill dealing with semantic variations, were benefited considerably by such drill.

Marshall's (138) study suggests that poetry is a useful expedient in developing first grade vocabulary. There is a question whether it was the poetic form or the more extensive reading which contributed to the results. But the differences between her control and her experimental groups were considerable and significant.

Gray and Holmes (89) quote Blind as recommending:

1. The use of the dictionary for: determining words correct, colloquial, slang, improprieties, and solecisms, meanings of words; words confused in use; finding antonyms; the study of word composition; derivations; shades of meanings in words; study of the history of words; synonyms; homonyms; finding new uses of old words.

2. Keeping a vocabulary notebook; choosing words for pictures and recording in a journal words that appeal to senses and paint pictures; listing adjectives

<sup>6</sup>Hollingworth, Leta: "Psychological Service for Public Schools," *Teachers College Record*, Vol. 34, pp. 369-379. February, 1933.

of approval and disapproval to replace *great*, *swell*, *awful*, *terrible*, etc.; listing words that describe or characterize particular objects or persons; listing new words from newspapers, magazines, and other general sources; keeping a record of new words and new use of old words—words you are tired of hearing and overworked words; listing new words found in connection with school subjects, a new sport, radio, aviation and the like; listing standard expressions and substituting for standard expressions.

3. Exercises for accuracy in word choice: selecting the accurate word in exercises; listing words often confused in meaning and use, accurately interpreted; distinguishing between the differences in meaning of similar words; writing sentences to show the meaning of words accurately used or to show differences in the meanings of words; rewriting paragraphs substituting more exact meanings of words; rewriting sentences, substituting concrete words where possible to bring out meaning more exactly or to correct errors in choice of words; listing specific words to convey meanings accurately; substituting specific for general words in sentences; substituting words in passages which have more appropriate connotations or more correct denotations; discussing orally denotations and connotations of words in specimen passages; and finding examples of poor taste in choice of words.

Cantor (30), in a very careful study, analyzed the experiences met in kindergarten excursions, and the concepts derived therefrom. The subsequent progress in first grade reading of children who had the benefit of such excursions was also studied. Analyzing the vocabularies of primary books used, Cantor found that the concepts developed through the excursions were well calculated to provide background and adequate concepts for words normally met in reading. The experimental group registered slight but consistent superiority which apparently was not due to intelligence. A great many terms met and words used during the excursions coincided with first grade and kindergarten lists, indicating that normal usage was stimulated and developed, that meanings were supplied, and concepts enriched.

Such studies give point to these recommendations of McAllister (140) quoted by Gray and Holmes.

The provision of an essential background of experience through dramatization, games, stories, excursions, observations explanations, study of objects, discussions, informal conversation.



2. Oral use of new words by the teacher in supplementary reading, in explanation of meanings, and in illustrative sentences.

3. Oral use of new words by the pupil, in informal talks, in the memorization of statements and poems, and in making reports about things observed or studied.

4. Explanations of the meanings of words through the use or study of synonyms, antonyms, word compounds, examples, illustrative sentences, a known contrasting word, and prefixes and suffixes.

5. Use of special vocabulary exercises involving the selecting of synonyms, and opposites, listing difficult words and asking for their meaning, listing descriptive words, choice words, and unusual words, studying parts of speech and elements of words, matching words with pictures, using prefixes and suffixes, completing sentences, expressing in word or phrase a specific idea or general impression.

6. Special study of pictures and illustrations.

7. Use of the dictionary, glossary, and other sources of information.

8. Use of vocabulary tests of various types in acquiring meanings as well as in measuring progress.

Similarly apropos is this excerpt from Storm (217):

The importance of the development of language control is brought out by Charles H. Judd (113) "Each word which he (the child) learns controls for the moment his thought. Each sentence that he hears shapes for him a succession of ideas and holds them in a certain order. After the individual has been under the influence of language for a time, he will begin to do most of his thinking by using the distinctions and relations which society has given him through its established modes of communication. Language is a mode of mental procedure. It is not something which we use from time to time; it is the method of our whole mental existence. An individual can no more get away from language than he can empty his mind of ideas."

Skill in language depends not only on a wealth of ideas, but it requires also a sufficiently abundant vocabulary to clothe these ideas. Since thought and language are twin products, the accumulation of a vocabulary implies growth of thought. There will be no enrichment of a child's vocabulary if he finds he needs only a limited supply of words. However, if his activities are widened they will act as stimuli for vocabulary development. The vocabulary of the normal child will grow just as rapidly as vital, varied situations are presented in which his participation requires the use of new words with some precision and accuracy. As Dewey has pointed out, few people can be fluent regarding things and processes to which they are strangers. All enrichment of experience, both within and without school, has a direct influence on the child's vocabulary. Every new situation needs new words, and actual experiences and realities build vocabulary. The child is constantly reaching out for additional experiences and for the vocabulary necessary to talk about these experiences. Environment, mental growth, and interest have much to do with the building of the child's vocabulary.

Vocabularies grow amazingly in the discussion periods after firsthand experiences and observation. Thorndike (226, 227) points out

however, that at times words can be taught profitably and vocabulary built up in isolation or in "phrases, sentences and paragraphs" provided for the immediate purpose. He suggests that this method permits of logical, psychological, linguistic, or etymological groupings. Likewise the method permits the use of graded materials, systematic testing and accommodation of difficulty to the needs of children.

All of these studies serve to point out the fact that a variety of methods may be used with profit, that the part of wisdom is to utilize many methods or specific methods in varying circumstances. They show clearly that lists alone, although valuable, are insufficient; that actual experiences are quite profitable; that direct instruction is effective but has distinct limitations; that vocabulary problems are often inherent in the type of subject matter introduced; and that the various meanings attaching themselves to most English words are not acquired through transfer from any one meaning. They show the necessity of carefully planned instruction.

So far nobody has submitted clear evidence of the difficulty presented by given words at the various grade levels; nobody has determined what words children use at each grade level; nobody has found out what makes a word hard to spell; nobody has studied exhaustively children's reactions to semantic variations of common words; nobody has studied sufficiently the extent to which technical words in the various school subjects introduce vocabulary difficulties; nobody has studied the "potential vocabulary" problem as it was defined in this bulletin.

## V. CERTAIN ASPECTS OF TESTING

In this section there is no attempt made to review all the tests of vocabu-



lary, rather the attempt is to suggest some of the difficulties inevitably associated with measurement.

Tilley (232) noted that the validity of a self-appraisal test of vocabulary was effected somewhat by the grades in school in which the pupils are found, by intelligence, and by the arrangement of words. Arranging the words in a list rather than in context seems to add to the validity. He states that pupils' judgment is reasonably valid in determining the difficulty of a list of words.

Louden (136) wondered if dull children, older chronologically than bright children of the same mental age, would, because of their greater maturity, exceed vocabulary test scores of such bright children. Using the vocabulary tests of the Stanford Revision he discovered that in spite of the great advantage of the dull group in terms of years, the mean score of the bright group greatly exceeded that of the dull group.

Mahan and Witmer (137), and Louden, studying the comparative difficulty of the two word lists in the Stanford Revision concluded that the second list is more difficult than the first and consequently the lists should not be used interchangeably. Louden's conclusions were that list one was considerably easier below the twelve-year level, approximately equal to the other list at the fourteen-year level, and more difficult for older children and adults.

Pyle (180) attempted to construct a set of equivalent sight vocabulary tests of equal difficulty with 50 words each using a number of first grade pupils in Detroit Training Schools. Thirty different lists were established by Pyle and are available from Wayne University.

Serenius (195) studied the technique employed in vocabulary testing working

with 203 eighth grade pupils. First he selected a list of 125 words from the new *Webster International Dictionary* by means of sampling. Some of the words came from the new word section and some from the forms printed at the bottom of the pages. From these words he devised 50 unaided recall tests. However, he found that these tests were not equivalent. Studying the problem further he found it difficult to measure the extent of an eighth grade child's vocabulary and insists that short tests are not reliable. He suggests a test of 500 words. This is considerably at variance with the rather extravagant claims made by various testers.

Codding (39) studied the comparative estimates of children's vocabulary when various sources were used for the test lists. He devised tests from the Thorndike list, from *Winston's Simplified Dictionary*, from *Webster's New International Dictionary*—100 word samplings from each. The conclusions were that the source had a great deal of bearing on the estimate arrived at.

Rossi (188), studying the vocabulary of a number of reading texts, compared the vocabulary of 27 standardized tests with the word lists of Horn and Gates. Rossi concludes there is great disparity in the vocabularies of various reading texts. Many words found in these texts were unreasonable.

Matthews (139), studying the tests used in the seventh and eighth grades as well as higher grades, listed 1948 different words found in test instruction. He found that 286 of these words were not in the Thorndike list at all. Matthews studied an enormous number of tests and points out a serious problem. A by-product is the reiteration of the fact that the position of a word in the Thorndike list is no inevitable indication of the

difficulty of that word. Matthews states that in all grades considerable difficulty was encountered.

Studying the comparative merits of a multiple choice test and a word checking test with 40 sixth grade pupils, Dolch (59) concluded that neither measured truly the amount of word knowledge. The results of the two tests did not agree. Dolch states that the multiple choice test in which pupils were asked to indicate which words they knew, about which words they were uncertain, and about which words they did not know, all introduced uncertainty and guessing.

Sims (203) asked children to identify words through definitions, then subjected them to a multiple response definition test, then to a matching test in which the children were asked to check words they could define and use. One hundred and ten pupils from grades five and eight were employed, and the test was composed of 70 words having but one commonly used meaning selected from the Thorndike test of word knowledge. Sims reported that the matching, multiple response, and identification through definition tests appeared to agree. The checking test seemed invalid. The matching test seemed the most satisfactory group measure of vocabulary.

Schindler (189) tested 223 third grade pupils from five school systems with words found in the *Horn-Ashbaugh Speller*. He used a multiple choice test in which the pupils were to choose the correct meanings from a group of meanings, and a second test in which pupils were asked to indicate which of several sentences illustrated the proper use of the word. He considered each method partially successful and states arbitrarily that the original sentence and the original definition method are unsatisfactory for grade three. The children were ac-

quainted apparently with about three-fourths of the words used.

Metz (147), experimenting with 400 pupils in five schools in two different cities, endeavored to determine to what extent children from kindergarten to grade three were able to define the words in the Gates list. She used 120 words from various frequency levels including 79 nouns and 41 verbs. The pupils were tested orally and individually and verbatim records were made. She found a wide distribution of scores; dividing the 120 words into two lists of 60 each she found a range of scores from 10 to 59. Girls showed slight superiority over boys. There was close relationship between the teachers' estimate of reading achievement and these scores. The older children tended to score higher. She found a sharp distinction between the ability of a child to use a word in a sentence and his ability to define the word.

Sussman (219) studied the relationship between reading comprehension and vocabulary knowledge with 101 fifth grade Brooklyn boys with the expected conclusions that there was a high relationship as measured by standard tests.

Grotheer (90), measuring the individual vocabulary status of kindergarten children by means of the Stanford Revision and a test constructed by selecting every fortieth word in Thorndike's 10,000 list, found high correlation between intelligence and word knowledge, between intelligence and adequacy of definition, between social status and vocabulary scores. She found tremendous individual variations. She reports that kindergarten children found it easier to define nouns and verbs than adjectives. Especially did she point out individual differences in concept, that is for example, whether an object is thought of in terms of use, size, shape, composition, class relationship, and the like.

Davies (49) conducted an investigation concerning the difficulty in the vocabulary of certain standardized tests when they were applied to 297 deaf pupils and 318 hearing pupils in grades four to nine in a number of different schools. After the first test, which involved 393 words selected from many standard tests designed for those grades, instructional procedure was employed, the teachers being asked to teach incidentally as many of the test words as possible. A retest showed that the difficulties apparent in the first test tended to persist. In a test of 150 words the deaf pupils scored 41 points lower than the hearing pupils. The Thorndike word list showed that the words used ranged from the first to fifth thousand. The whole study shows the fact that vocabulary understanding is a considerable factor in test performance. The instructions regarding the conduct of the tests as well as the tests proper, introduced many difficulties.

These studies show, in general, the relationship between intelligence, maturity, and vocabulary. But they show also the extreme difficulty of testing vocabulary. It is difficult to tell just how many words do constitute an adequate sampling for testing recognition, and there is an even greater difficulty in measuring the depth or area of understanding. Conferences and observation of use are necessary and certainly must be employed to supplement test results.

## VI. SUMMARIZING STATEMENT

A. With reference to lists a tremendous amount of work has been done. Studies directed toward spelling alone have considered close to 1,500,000 running words. Studies of reading vocabulary add millions more. Studies of oral language are not so numer-

ous, but still add an impressive increment. These studies have shown:

1. With reasonable reliability, the 20,000 words most frequently met in printed materials of non-technical nature.
2. The three or four thousand words most frequently used by ordinary individuals in their writing. We know that except for comparatively few words, this list corresponds with the 3000-4000 words most frequently met in reading.
3. That there is some difference between the vocabulary of adults and that of children; that there are certain slight differences attributable to geographic reasons; that there are some slight sex differences; that there are differences due to intelligence and to language environment. But we also know that the central core of 3000-4000 words is not affected greatly by these differences.
4. That the vocabulary of children is much greater than has often been supposed.
5. That children use more words in oral than in written discourse.
6. That the stimulus provided affects results so completely that no word list can be final, because no one can exhaust stimulus possibilities. Consequently all vocabulary problems are twofold. They can be handled generally with reference to core-words, but must be handled individually beyond that point.
7. That words must be considered not only in isolated form but in phrases, in use.

8. That the frequency with which a word is used provides no sure index of difficulty.
  9. That neither studies of what children write in school nor studies of what they write outside school provide complete clues as to what children know about words.
  10. That the lists so far compiled give us a pretty clear idea of what children *have done* in described circumstances, less clear knowledge of what they *might do* in all circumstances, still less notion of what they *should do*, ideally.
  11. That lists are not inevitably or uniformly good. Too many studies based upon primary sources have failed completely to weigh properly or at all the contributions from different sources; that each list has been criticized because it is alleged to be "over-weighted" or "under-weighted" in one direction or another; that certain composite lists, derived by compilation from other lists, have been put together without due consideration of the relative importance of each contributory list.
  12. That semantic variations, inflectional changes, and contextual use have not been considered sufficiently as lists were compiled.
  13. That the more carefully compiled lists and studies described in this bulletin provide exceedingly useful information, and that the limiting factors are carefully stated by the authors of those lists. Especially to be recommended are the studies of Ernest Horn and his associates; Mrs. Ernest Horn; Buckingham; Dolch; Paul McKee; Grace McKee; Fitzgerald; Tidyman; Thorndike; Lorge; Gates. Probably Rinsland's name would be added to this list, were his study available.
  14. That it is impossible to exhaust the subject, impossible to assign all words likely to be used by children in given grades or at given mental ages to those grades or ages. The matter resolves itself into a problem of relative values, employing compromises, between generalization and individualization. The law of diminishing returns sets in sharply even after the 2000 most commonly used words have been determined. After 4000 words have been listed that law operates exceedingly sharply. The richness of the English language makes this inevitable.
- B. With reference to textbook and subject difficulties available studies show:
1. That reading texts frequently require, for complete understanding, many more concepts than children ordinarily possess, and that the diversity and difficulty of the vocabulary loads in such texts vary greatly, as do the rate at which new words are introduced and the number of repetitions provided; that experience reading should supplement book reading and vice versa; that the vocabulary of words children know when they enter school is vastly greater than the vocabulary of the books they use.



2. That recognition of a word by no means guarantees understanding, and that understanding a word in one setting by no means implies complete understanding.
3. That different subject fields present distinct problems of tremendous extent; that children who presumably had been taught many terms in such fields as mathematics, history, geography, and science had erroneous concepts concerning those terms; that these erroneous concepts persist in higher grades and that the children who possess them are by no means found only in the lower levels of intelligence.
4. That lists of technical terms have been prepared in many subject fields, but that many of the vocabulary difficulties met in those fields are due rather to abstract or figurative or involved writing, not to inevitable difficulties of the subject itself.
5. That these subject field difficulties are not insurmountable. They can be overcome by careful teaching and a deliberate pace in the classroom, by providing thorough explanation, by investigating at frequent intervals the understanding each child has attained, by using visual or tactual materials or other illustrative media. Such methods have proved much more useful than roundabout attempts to simplify or otherwise to dodge the real issue, which is that children should be *taught*, not simply allowed to see and say words.

C. In reference to related factors, other

than those suggested in other sections, research indicates:

1. That intelligence is a considerable factor in vocabulary development. Consequently provision should be made especially for the very bright, in developing them to the utmost. We know also that I. Q. as well as mental age is involved in this factor.
  2. That teaching vocabulary in one setting, or for one use, does not provide for complete transfer.
  3. That imagery, phonetic, ability, richness of experience contribute to vocabulary development.
  4. That vocabulary development is closely associated with thinking and acquisition of ideas.
- D. With reference to developing vocabulary we have a right to believe:
1. That one cannot depend upon word lists to state all of the words children can, will, or should use, or to provide an index of difficulty; that many of the lists are manifestly paradoxical in minor details—for example, excluding words often used by children but not found as often in writing or in adult usage.
  2. That richness and variety of the vocabulary used depends largely upon the variety of stimuli employed.
  3. That real, concrete experiences not only extend vocabulary, but make meaningful the words already at one's command, and that such media are used too infrequently.
  4. That unless the use of the dictionary is taught, limited results are obtained.

# Editorial

## Composition Is Cultural

MISS MARGARET MESSICK in her article, "Enjoying Compositions," raises a profoundly interesting question, for in the subject of composition is focused an age-old conflict. From the time of Socrates, who made composition soul-searching and self-revealing, to the time of the Sophists and to the more recent rhetoricians who made it an end in itself, composition has been the play-thing of teachers. Only when the subject has been made truly to engage the student in thought, feeling and in creative imagination has it proved educationally valuable. Composition is assimilative; hence cultural.

Take reading, for example. Reading literature changes a person—does something for him—only when he gains in consciousness of its significance. His appreciation is heightened if he tries to say what the literature means to him. The test of comprehension of what is read is expression. So it is also with other acts or experiences—talking and writing about them are processes of sublimation as well as of expression. Composition, therefore, tends to deepen insight into life and into art. As a matter of fact, educational growth depends upon mental reactions and verbal responses. Thinking and expression are complementary processes.

Of course, then, Miss Messick is right, for actually there can be no composition unless there is this fullness of response on the part of the pupil. The only real difficulty of the matter lies in the fact that so many and such varied aims lie before the teacher in any composition activity. Some teachers, in a sense, deliberately make composition a hard and boring subject both for themselves and for the children, because their aims are

solely disciplinary; not that there should be any taboo upon discipline, but discipline must be made timely and intelligible to the pupil.

Once the idea that composition is cultural is sincerely and thoroughly grasped, these old confusions about discipline disappear. The child, as he becomes actively interested in a composition, warms up to his subject emotionally and imaginatively. Then, in the normal course of things, with firmly set purposes of expression in mind, he becomes aware of the needs for skill at expression to enable him to say or write well of what he thought or imagined.

There is no natural or inherent antipathy between a pupil and ideas of discipline. In other words, there is no need to drive the subject at children with the feeling that compulsion is essential to training. All that is necessary is that composition be so handled by the teacher that the pupil, who, after all, is an intelligent being, can see that there is more to it than merely a gust of words. Through the stirring of his feelings and his imagination the pupil senses that he has something to express or communicate. Just here is the real crux of the teacher's problem in helping the pupil to realize that what he has to say may be said poorly or well, and that doing it well is like playing a game in which certain things must be understood and done with skill.

It becomes apparent then that composition taught as Miss Messick suggests is cultural in that it engages the pupil in a whole-souled way in expression. Once composition is placed upon this basis its worth and significance become apparent at all school levels, and so, pleasurable.

# Shop Talk

## MUCH ADO ABOUT SOMETHING

EDITOR'S NOTE: In the March, 1939, issue of *The Review* there appeared an article on "The Language Arts in Public Schools," by Dr. J. L. Meriam. This paper raised so many interesting questions and presented such a stimulating viewpoint that the editor invited discussion. The following article is a response to this invitation.

SOMETIMES A CARTOON appears in the daily paper about the first of September. A downcast boy is usually depicted as dragging his unwilling feet to school after a summer of freedom. Keen observers of children's reactions resent this cartoon for they know that it is not true to life. Surely children enjoy freedom! They enjoy the growth that comes from school instruction in the language arts, too. Growth, extension of ideas, and gain in abilities which have meaning are a concomitant part of every normal child's development. It is no accident that many children do not drag unwilling feet to school.

The improvement in the general school situation which results in children enjoying school more than their fathers did is the result of careful planning. This planning may not be evident to the casual observer, or even in its entirety to some teachers, but it nevertheless exists. It is planning that is done by research workers, students of classroom procedure, administrators and makers of textbooks.

Quite a large body of research findings in education now exists. These findings are open to certain criticisms. Sometimes they are based on relatively few data. Often there has been no repetition of experiments to confirm findings. Some problems have not been clearly defined. Frequently the refinement of techniques is needed. Admitting all the shortcomings of educational research some conclusions have adequate supporting data. Among these are the following: (1) Education is a problem of multiple adjustments which requires attention to many details. (2) Abilities may be broken up into component skills, the breaking down of any one of which interferes with the functioning of the ability. The committees which have brought out the yearbooks in reading are aware of these facts. Consequently they direct the thinking of teachers to the complexity of the learning process, realizing that it is only by attention to many details that the pupil may achieve the requisite ability in language arts. Consequently, if the procedure is wrong, it is the basic philosophy of educators that is in error.

The producers of textbooks, both authors and publishers, bring out the kind of books teachers want. Otherwise no books would be sold. While some books may have as their impetus the desire of financial reward, most of them are the expression of a sincere

desire to make a contribution to children's learning. Few authors receive large royalties from their publications. Publishing houses expect to make money, but so, too, does a college professor. Any educational publisher worthy of the name expends large sums on research, editorial work, and a staff of artists in an attempt to produce good books. If the texts and workbook materials used in the schools are not what they should be, the teachers should demand the proper kind. Such a demand would meet an immediate response.

Teaching the language arts is not a matter of taking a group of children on an unplanned journey through a flower garden and allowing them to snatch beauty wherever they choose. Little that is worthwhile would be learned that way. The proper procedure is to direct them along paths made pleasant by adequate attention to what must be learned and providing for these situations in a common sense way. The satisfaction that comes with achievement on the part of the learners will generate the inner glow that results from the realization of growth of ability in a field of recognized value. Such a result comes only from adequate planning which is based on a sound philosophy of education, a planning often not realized by the learner.

An analogy may be drawn between good health and competency in the language arts. One in a state of good health does not think about the multitude of adjustments that produce the state of health. But if he has not achieved good health or has had it impaired, he seeks out the function that is impaired and gives specific attention to it. He does not go tripping through the land of health eating good food, sleeping a sufficient length of time, and taking exercise. He is more concerned with discovering what adjustments he lacks and doing the particular thing that needs to be done.

Similarly one may be in a "healthy" state in the language arts. If so, he certainly does not need remedial exercises or reading aptitude tests. But suppose he is not "healthy" in the language arts. His salvation then is not to go on enjoying literature or reading whatever suits his fancy. The sensible procedure is to discover where there is a deficiency and make an attempt to overcome it. Fortunate is the child who being in such a situation has a teacher who knows enough about the specifics of education to prescribe the necessary treatment even if it does include the use of textbooks and drill exercises. One who is "unhealthy" in the language arts may easily die of "educational appendicitis." Teachers who let such an event happen had better examine their basic philosophy and practice.

—WILLIAM A. MILLER

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# Reviews and Abstracts

**Reading and the Educative Process.** By Paul Witty and David Kopel. Boston, Ginn & Company, 1939. 374 p.

The thesis of this book is to the effect that reading is an integral part of the educative process. The educational philosophy held by the authors leads them to regard reading as one of the contributing factors in the growth and development of the child. Reading as a continuous process is emphasized by the discussion of problems such as reading readiness from the level of the young child to the college period. Starting with the point of view that education must begin with children where they are, Dr. Witty and Dr. Kopel stress the fact that a genuine understanding of the individual child is essential to any procedure which the teacher uses. The authors give interests and attitudes a prominent place in the discussion, although a number of studies such as Jordan's are not listed in the bibliography. The interest inventory presented in detail with its inclusion of all the activities of a child's twenty-four hour day forms a valuable basis not only for reading, but for all school experiences. The influence of the movies and the radio is brought sharply into focus as they relate to the educative process.

Although the total reading experience is considered as the point of departure, stress is placed upon remedial reading since the authors state early in the volume that, "Extreme retardation is very frequent in our schools." The causation, analysis, and prevention of reading difficulties receive detailed discussion. These sections contain excellent descriptions of research studies which are brought together here in a usable form. The chapters on types of remedial programs and the place of the reading clinic, give practical help for the organization of similar services in school systems. Especially helpful features of the book are found in the appendix in the form of a diagnostic child study record; list of reading tests with not only the grades in which they may be used, but the publisher, address, and price; the section on reading sources and resources; and the detailed index.

The book will be widely used in schools of education by students and research workers. As Dr. Buckingham points out in the foreword, the authors of this volume take a position at the extreme I end of the S-I (Skills-to-Interests) scale which represents a range of opinion from that holding skills as the basis for growth in reading, to the one stressing interests as the primary factor. Possibly for this reason, somewhat arbitrary interpretations are made throughout the volume, of certain studies which call for an organized development of reading skills.

The classroom teacher will raise some practical

problems which the volume does not answer for her. How can competent guidance be given to reading experience unless the teacher has access to some commonly accepted standards of accomplishment? What kind of remedial work can and should be done in grades I, II, and III with certain children whose reading difficulties will not be eliminated by maturation? Can such an ability as location of material be developed by incidental use? Presupposing an initial experience in which the ability is used and subsequent situations which call for some phase or phases of the ability, isn't there a need for some organized sequence in developing the unit skills?

*Reading and the Educative Process* is a stimulating volume. For those whose educational viewpoint places them at the same end of the scale as the authors, it will be an authoritative source book for principles and practices in the field of remedial reading.

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**The Saber-Tooth Curriculum.** . . Including Other Lectures in the History of Paleolithic Education. . . by J. Abner Peddiwell, Ph.D. as told to Raymond Wayne and Several Tequila Daisies with a Foreword by Harold Benjamin, McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., New York and London, 1939, pp. xiii 139

The only thing required to reduce *The Saber-Tooth Curriculum* to the status of a mental foundling is to throw doubt upon the existence of Mr. Benjamin who, in his preface, assumes the role of foster parent to the book-child which, he alleges, was left on his doorstep. With complete divorcement from any vestige of authenticity, this clever castigation of modern educational clack might filter past the brain cells of the readers and become ultimately the lost diatribe of Benjamin. But as long as Mr. Benjamin's personality creeps into the consecutive chapters with a certain compelling credence, the reader is constrained to attend to this teller of paleolithic tales, who holds him with his glittering tongue.

Like all professorish people, Dr. Peddiwell (a name which is no improvement on Benjamin from the point of view of euphony) tells his story of fish-grabbing, horse-clubbing, and tiger-scaring with no attempt to force an interpretation and application of his "historical data." He depends entirely upon the alert mind of his reader and the magic properties of a tequilah daisy for transfer. Perhaps this is exactly what the paleolithic



masters of the outmoded fish-grabbing school depended on when they insisted that the techniques of fish-grabbing were fundamental to culture.

One of the most tingling shafts of satire is aimed at the "sacred-name complex" with which the educational profession is afflicted. "It's wonderful—wonderful," declare the learned observers of the real-fish experimental school, "but you've got to explain it with names." One of our indoor pastimes as educators is to append names to things and then engage in endless debate over the interpretation of terminology. The latter foible is one which Dr. Peddiwell Benjamin's searching irony has not dealt with adequately. But it would be impossible to laugh at everything laughable in one carousing guffaw—and that is what the book is: one long laugh. It is refreshing, however, to find a college professor of education viewing, to the accompaniment of a deep diaphragmatic chuckle, some of the antics and pedantics of certain professional pedagogues, both paleolithic and progressive.

*The Saber-Tooth Curriculum* undoubtedly says, with a slap on the back instead of one in the face, what many sympathetic critics of education have been wanting to say. The advantage of Mr. Benjamin's double-barreled salt barrage is that it stings without stunning.

One final comment: It seems that Mrs. Peddiwell, of whom Doctor P. stands in unholy awe, profited more than he from paleolithic fundamentals. She apparently was proficient in the art of fish-grabbing (and possibly horse-clubbing) and exercised it with great success upon Peddiwell. If the latter had elected the course in tiger-scaring and had mastered even the elementary techniques of the art, he could have used it to great advantage in controlling the domestic situation, but apparently even the ritual of the torch-butt was unfamiliar to the eminent Doctor.

—ROY IVAN JOHNSON  
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## INTRODUCING ENGLISH

(Continued from page 22)

the growing of coffee and the children's visit to a coffee plantation may be placed on the school bulletin board.

In conclusion, it may be well to emphasize again that in a school system where the English language is not the native language of the majority group, English will probably function most satisfactorily if its program contributes to the general program of the school.

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